

on I must beg everyone not to be
e. It is written for idle people; yes,
eive that it is a joke to tease Less-

VI B 35:19 n.d., 1845

os in the *Symposium*. In his disserta-
ert enough to discern the Socratic
rstood it, probably because, with the
as become super-clever and objec-
d the courage to acknowledge the
course, the continued and the per-
d a goal without attaining it means
od, striving is life itself and is essen-
posed of the infinite and the finite.
ment is a chimera. It may well be that
can be regarded as true, it needs to
has been done up to now, but the
subject, consequently is in contradic-
s of becoming, consequently is, if he

VI B 35:24 n.d., 1845

v in a beautiful legend, I should lead
and not enter myself, that I should
anity and that as my punishment for
myself would not enter in but would
n incomparable future. . . .¹²⁴⁰

VI B 40:33 n.d., 1845

ναί—and τὸ ὄν.¹²⁴¹ The confusion in
servation on this by R. Nielsen in his

VI C 1 n.d., 1845

organ's breast.

VI A 28 n.d., 1845

1845-1846

277

* 5800

The contradiction: the driver of the modest hearse who had only
half-covered the single horse with the horse-blanket so as to whip it
better the profundity in death the prosaicism in this.

VI A 29 n.d., 1845

* 5801

A New Book
God's Judgment[*]¹²⁴³
A Story of Suffering
A Psychological Experiment
by
. . . . de profundis

Here the categories of sin are used. His inclosing reserve is due
to his not daring to let anyone know that it is a punishment he is
suffering.

[*] *In margin*: A married man.

VI A 31 n.d., 1845

* 5802

In margin of 5801 (VI A 31):

It would be easy enough for him to find release if he would initiate
her into his suffering, but he fears to do this for the very reason that
the frightfulness of it will completely destroy her or make her sympa-
thetic¹²⁴⁴ in such a way that she will follow him like Cain's wife,¹²⁴⁵ and
this is precisely what he does not want. —On the other hand, he thinks
he owes it to God to be silent erotically this way about his sufferings.

See p. 185, bottom [i.e., VI A 47].

See p. 194 [i.e., VI A 55-59].

VI A 32 n.d., 1845

* 5803

Now is the moment, now is the time, to write a dialectical guide
to pseudonymous books by all the pseudonymous authors.¹²⁴⁶

VI A 40 n.d., 1845

* 5804 *The Relation between Either/Or and
the Stages*¹²⁴⁷

In *Either/Or*¹²⁴⁸ the competing components were the esthetic and
the ethical, and the ethical was the choice. For this reason there were



only two components, and the Judge was unconditionally the winner, even though the book ended with a sermon and with the observation that only the truth that builds up is the truth for me (inwardness—the point of departure for my upbuilding discourses).

In the *Stages*¹²⁴⁹ there are three components and the situation is different.

(1) the esthetic-sensate is thrust into the background as something past (therefore "a memory," for after all it cannot become utterly nothing).

The young man (thought—melancholy); Constantin Constantius (hardening of the understanding). Victor Eremita, who can no longer be the editor (sympathetic irony); the fashion designer (demonic despair); Johannes the seducer (damnation, a "marked" individual). He concludes by saying that woman is merely a moment. At that very point the Judge begins: Woman's beauty increases with the years, her reality [*Realitet*] is precisely in time.¹²⁵⁰

—(2) The ethical component is polemical: the Judge¹²⁵¹ is not giving a friendly lecture but is grappling in existence, because he cannot end here, even though with pathos he can triumph again over every esthetic stage but not measure up to the esthetes in wittiness.

(3) The religious comes in a demonic approximation (Quidam¹²⁵² of the experiment) with humor as its presupposition and its incognito (Frater Taciturnus).¹²⁵³

VIA 41 n.d., 1845

« 5805

A story of *suffering*;¹²⁵⁴ suffering is the religious category.

In *Stages* the esthete is no longer a clever fellow frequenting B's living room—a hopeful man, etc., because he still is only a possibility; no, he is existing [*existerer*].

"It is exactly the same as *Either/Or*."

Constantin Constantius and the Young Man placed together in Quidam of the experiment. (Humor advanced.)

as a point of departure for the beginning
of the religious.—

just as the tragic hero was used to bring out faith.

Three Stages and yet one *Either/Or*.

VIB 41:10 n.d., 1845

1845-1846

« 5806

Dear Sir:

As I have sent Mr. Philipsen, the 1st edition of my *Upbuilding Discourses*, would deliver to him upon request the copies.

May 10, 1845

To

Mr. Bianco Luno, printer

« 5807

The only utilizable character on board (a jaunty student) wearing a velvet cap, a striped tunic over a coat, a cane hanging from the buttons. Guileless, open, much naive, bashful, and yet cheerful. By contrast, the traveler (like Mr. Hagen¹²⁵⁷) a mournful

« 5808

The Secrets of a
See p. 163 in this book
(Private Tutor)
or
Close to unhappiness and y

In life there are many such situations alongside, and consequently on the outside most.

In margin by the title: Sophie Beaumont
(Clavijo)

person closed up within himself is
 e himself discovers that his guilt is
 een closed up within himself. —The
 nderstood, he is not greater at this
 at away; the closedupness therefore
 e this discovery, he again keeps it to

VIA 61 n.d., 1845

¹²⁶³ that is formed in Pastor Grund-

VIA 73 n.d., 1845

's grave,¹²⁶⁵ felt an unusual compul-
 ually withdrawn within myself—and
 he entrance near the turn, a woman
 l and parasol, a really silly sort of
 her face, and she addresses an old
 om me, a basket on her arm: What
 n waiting for half an hour now (the
 he ran back and forth like a dog)—
 ny sister is ready to cry, the hearse
 ole eral party, and the trumpet
 Therefore the sister who was about
 cause the trumpet players had come
 t. —I walked down another path, and
 n the vicinity of Father's grave. But
 ates itself, particularly into the most

June 10, 1845

VIA 75 June 10, 1845

(A 75):
 th a touch of irony under the title:

VIA 76 n.d., 1845

1845-1846

283

* 5822

New Zealanders kiss each other with their noses. Engel¹²⁶⁶ in his
Mimik quotes a passage from a travel account which he reports.

VIA 77 n.d., 1845

* 5823

William Afham's part (in the *Stages*) is so deceptively contrived
 that it is praise and high distinction to have stupid fuss-budgets pass
 trivial judgment on it and say that it is the same old thing. Yes, that
 is just the trick. I never forget the anxiety I myself felt about not being
 able to achieve what I had once accomplished, and yet it would have
 been so very easy to choose other names. This is also the reason Afham
 states that Constantius said that never again would he arrange a ban-
 quet, and Victor Eremita, that he would never again speak admiringly
 of Don Juan.¹²⁶⁷ But the Judge declares that he will keep on repeat-
 ing.* As the author himself suggested, wherever it is possible and
 wherever it is not possible.

*"That only thieves and gypsies say that one must never return
 where he has once been."¹²⁶⁸

VIA 78 n.d., 1845

* 5824

The *Stages* will not have as many readers as *Either/Or*, will barely
 make a ripple. That is fine; in a way it rids me of the gawking public
 who want to be wherever they think there is a disturbance. I proph-
 esied this myself in the epilogue to "Guilty?/Not Guilty?"¹²⁶⁹

VIA 79 n.d., 1845

* 5825

There is something that grates on me in being a teacher—it would
 be best if a pastor were to read another pastor's sermon aloud so that
 he himself could really become a listener to the exhortation.

VIA 82 n.d., 1845

* 5826

They think it is so easy; they attack my presentation as mistaken
 in maintaining a doubleness¹²⁷⁰—they should try it themselves. The
 vociferous, assertive direct method is much easier.

VIA 83 n.d., 1845

ter²⁰⁷⁵ is my brother and obviously has enable him to pass judgment,²⁰⁷⁶ and responsibility for placing him in such a d and the dialectical riddle of my life of and the pain of my life can be used as a umiliation of actually having judged me ded him, but with extreme circumspec-

s step.
ough confidence in his judgment. So it for my own sake. I understand him very able to interpret my life as anything but at.

easy, for we have long been familiar with sy to think that way instead of venturing lectual exertions contained in my books, dicate the fine line between egotism and . To a great extent my essentiality as an ally h ng discovered: sympathetic pas-

it is much handier to interpret my life that o regard one's own *Stilleben*²⁰⁷⁸ as reli-

and proof that a man does not understand . This explains his opinion that the opposi- emesis or God's punishment.
ned it is a matter of indifference, but my y, I have taken care of.

x¹ A 61 n.d., 1849

itle: *Wisdom for a Penny Bought with a Million*
R. Green,²⁰⁷⁹ published toward the end of ationed by Ben Jonson in his work *Epicoene*, collected works,²⁰⁸⁰ II, p. 371, first column

x¹ A 63 n.d., 1849

Poetic Individual

as made gossip his profession and living etc. (t²⁰⁸¹) to be considered as belonging to the

community again, it should be required that he first and foremost unconditionally apologize at least once a year for as many years as he has carried on the profession. He also could be required to give back the money he has made—Judas did that; after all, he gave back the thirty shekels.

x¹ A 67 n.d., 1849

* 6322

In the *Kirketidende*²⁰⁸² (for Feb. 2, 1849) I see in a sort of review of Birchdahl's²⁰⁸³ sermons that he will not recognize a state church at all and battles it in his sermons. Excellent, here again we have one of those confused phenomena—he ought to perceive that the first thing he would have to do would be to resign his position as pastor in the state church, give up his livelihood. But of course he would have an easy answer to that: Then I would have nothing to live on. And of course that can be understood by the whole world, which sees nothing wrong with earning one's bread and butter but considers what I say to be an exaggeration. But there is no doubt that Birchdahl should do it for his own sake in order to see whether or not his conviction is so firm that he could make a sacrifice for it.

x¹ A 71 n.d., 1849

* 6323

The same objection which the Judge in *Either/Or*²⁰⁸⁴ uses to trap A (confronting him with a young man who wants to talk with him, instead of lecturing and admonishing him—very moving—see especially the second essay in part II), the same objection is made by life itself against the person who wants to enter into decisive religious categories of which cruelty is one aspect. Life prompts one to become aware of the many, many less endowed, weak, simple men, women, and children, the sick and the sorrowful, etc., who live among us. Life says to the religious: Confronted by all these people, can you have the heart to jack up the price²⁰⁸⁵ of the religious, of salvation, as high as you are doing, you cruel person. And if the religious person is truly religious and consequently has love in his heart, this objection will make a deep impression on him, one who wants so much to be with those who suffer, whose only joy and consolation, after all, is to comfort those who suffer.

But the objection is the spiritual trial of "human sympathy." What does the prototype teach? Was Christ lenient with himself, or the others. Was it human sympathy to say to the person who was willing

to follow him but merely asked to bury his father first: Let the dead bury their dead.²⁰⁸⁶ Humanly speaking, is it not cruel, humanly speaking almost shocking, to forbid him something that is a matter of piety? We do not say that Christ, after all, was high and mighty and therefore there must not be any meddling in sympathy; that is a misunderstanding, for Christ was not high and mighty, but He was love and the greater His love the less His cruelty would have to be. Not so, Christ is the absolute, and this cruelty is inseparable from the absolute. Nor is there the slightest trace of human sympathy in his reply to poor Peter: Get behind me, Satan.²⁰⁸⁷ After all, Peter meant the best for Christ in his own way, that is, in human sympathy—and then to treat him that way.

The point is that the religious person unconditionally shall and must have sympathy for all the weak; he wants to be with them, comfort them, and all that, but he does not dare do it—that is, he does not dare center his life in this sympathy so that instead of remaining true to God he scales down and remains in the religiosity of sympathy.

As soon as a religious person ceases to comprehend it this way: I dare not, I cannot do otherwise (that is, he is in the power of the absolute, absolute obedience is demanded of him), he will be side-tracked and will remain in the religiosity of sympathy.

The danger for the religious person who is in the religiousness of the absolute is, of course, self-righteousness, that he becomes arrogant instead of pious, that he wants to be better than other men or puts God, as it were, in his debt, or at least has a self-satisfied consciousness of having done his part.

For this reason such a religious person will usually have a secret strain, comparable to Paul's "thorn in the flesh,"²⁰⁸⁸ which gives him the bold confidence to go on, because it teaches him that he is nothing and truly makes this truth in him. No one can venture out into absolute religiousness on his own; he must begin in an altogether singular understanding with God. Under other circumstances, that which in absolute religiousness is dialectically cruel becomes outright cruelty, sin, guilt.

x¹ A 72 n.d., 1849

« 6324

Strangely enough, the Chinese have the same custom as the Jews. Confucius's name is *Khu* or *Ju*, but when the name appears in the sacred books, the people are forbidden to utter it—it is recommended

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instead that they read it as *Mou*. It is the loose way in which the name of Confucius is really all wrong. Curiously, I have persons in which I have been unable to mention it because I regard it as too solemn. I have called it a "psychological experiment," where I thought that the girl has pledged herself to him and I dare not dare utter, that is, the name of Confucius.

See *China, historisch-malerisch*,²⁰⁹⁰

« 6325 *Deliberations*

It is clear that once again my prudence wanted to deceive me.

I practically had decided not to publish the edition of *Either/Or*.²⁰⁹¹ (1) The situation was confused, and then to have to say what was notorious and branded as I am—yes, although in fact it is almost as if one hurled himself at me now I need a little peace and quiet. (2) It was not necessary, even obligatory, to think of any other way or another I become the extraordinary person itself would possibly be a hindrance to my standing tells me that it would be hurtful to what I have ready. (3) It would be almost impossible in any way have the emotion-charged extraordinary. —But in that case I could not.

But the answer to all that must be given is not but prudence and melancholy. As far as the magnitude of it only makes it more of a danger in trusting in God to venture into it; if I do not, danger. —As far as getting an appointment would be a luxury. But the whole thing is a possibility which looks as if it were so merely to disturb me and prevent me in that direction. But if it becomes something new, aspects arising again: ergo, it is an appointment whether or not I am qualified for an appointment and just what I wanted—without from acting decisively in the most crucial

or a child, who after all does not have a
 me importance, this method is not at all
 ild's gradually coming under the power
 ving at a later time occasion to appropri-
 e profound sense.

X¹ A 137 n.d., 1849

N.B.

V.B. N.B.
 N.B.

al intention was always to try to get ap-
 rish.²¹⁴⁴ But at the time I was actually
 to having become, despite my efforts,
 n author. Now the situation is entirely
 so unrewarding, that for the time it is
 penitent to stay where he is. Humanly
 I would give it up, for the generation in
 ne indeed when an author of my compe-
 is treated in this way. I have no interest
 em, for in fact there is hardly one I really
 o judge me. Christianly speaking, my only
 d.

always said, that the place was unoccupied:
 stop. Right. But I was bound to the idea
 ianity into Christendom, albeit poetically
 ly, not making myself a missionary). That,
 But the trouble is that it nauseates me to
 o this generation, a word which merely will
 expose me to new nastiness. And if it is
 until after my death. But Christianly, the
 dience. If it had anything to do with this
 ould never have kept his mouth closed.
 whether it is more humiliating to declare
 er afford to be an author and now take on
 lay myself wide open to all that may follow
 please note, not making myself an extraor-
 disciples.

ng to remember—that my original thought
 rtain control. How many times have I not
 get its orders until it is out at sea, and thus
 or me to go farther as an author than I had

originally intended, especially since I have become an author in an
 entirely different sense, for originally, I thought of being an author as
 an escape, something temporary, from going to the country as a pas-
 tor. But has not my situation already changed in that *qua* author I have
 begun to work for the religious. At first I planned to stop immediately
 after *Either/Or*. That was actually the original idea. But productivity
 took hold of me. Then I planned to stop with the *Concluding Postscript*.
 But what happens, I get involved in all that rabble persecution, and
 that was the very thing that made me remain on the spot. Now, I said
 to myself, now it can no longer be a matter of abandoning splendid
 conditions, no, now it is a situation for a penitent. Then I was going
 to end with *Christian Discourses* and travel, but I did not get to travel—
 and 1848 was the year of my richest productivity. Thus Governance
 himself has kept me in the harness. I ask myself: Do you believe that
 out in the rural parish you would have been able to write three reli-
 gious books²¹⁴⁵ such as the three following *Concluding Postscript*? And
 I am obliged to answer: No! It was the tension of actuality which put
 new strength into my instrument, forced me to publish even more.
 And so again in 1848.

Moreover, now it is only a question of publishing a few short
 ethical-religious essays—and three friendly notes. But as I said, I have
 become sickened at the thought of having to address what I say to such
 an age, to which, humanly speaking, the only proper response would
 be silence.

I must travel in the spring.

X¹ A 138 n.d., 1849

6357

N.B.

"In every one of the pseudonymous works the theme of 'the single
 individual' appears"²¹⁴⁶—yes, certainly, and the following is one of
 several ways: the pseudonymous writers concentrate upon working out
 the universal, the single individual [*den Enkelte*], the special individual
 [*den særlige Enkelte*], the exception, in order to find the meaning of the
 special individual in his suffering and his extraordinariness.

The Judge in *Either/Or* had already posed this with respect to the
 exception from being married.

Then came *Fear and Trembling—Repetition*, the psychological exper-
 iment²¹⁴⁷—all commentaries on the category: the single individual.

But in relation to the reading public, the pseudonymous writers
 themselves as well as the books affirm the category of the single indi-
 vidual.

X¹ A 139 n.d., 1849

CHAPTER VIII

Kierkegaard's Indirect and Direct Clash
with Hegel in the Authorship from *Either/Or*
to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

1. INTRODUCTORY COMMENT

JUST AS KIERKEGAARD's private jottings from November 1842 to December 1845 bear clear indications of having been done during an uninterrupted period of work, so also the Authorship during these three years manifests a coherent but complicated totality.

It would not be unreasonable in this connection to look for an answer to the question of Kierkegaard's clash with Hegel through an analysis that would ignore the works as separate productions and read them as if they were chapters of a single book. This approach could be defended with particularly good reason, and it would, in a way, correspond to the purely systematic presentations of Kierkegaard's world of thought such as Malantschuk's renowned *Kierkegaard's Way to the Truth* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963) or Sløk's *Die Anthropologie Kierkegaards*. If we approach the task in this way, however, we will not adequately take into account the fact that Kierkegaard did not publish his thoughts during this period as a multivolume work. He wrote and published the works as separate entities, and each of them is in itself a totality, a whole, a globe, as it has been correctly said, "which turns on its own axis," and just as correctly: "But as a globe it has a fixed connection with other globes; Kierkegaard's works are related to each other as globes in a planetary system."¹ To a higher degree than the purely systematic presentations, the many works on the Authorship that are arranged with somewhat equal attention to the temporal and conceptual [*tankemæssige*] sequences, such as Lindström's *Stadiernas teologi* [Theology of the Stages], or Anna Paulsen's *Søren Kierkegaard, Deuter unserer Existenz* [SK, Interpreter of Our Existence], or Knud Hansen's *Søren Kierkegaard, Ideens Digter* [SK, Poet of the Idea], respect Kierke-

¹ F. J. Billeskov Jansen in the Introduction (p. xvii) to *Kierkegaard's Værker i Udvalg* [Selections from Kierkegaard's Works], I (1950).

gaard's own approach, which simply cannot be called haphazard.

In these and similar presentations, in various ways and with diverse results it becomes clear that in Kierkegaard's Authorship there is a close connection between the chronological sequence in which different questions are taken up and the systematic rank order of the thoughts. Thus, if we follow the presentation of the stages, for example, it is clear that chronology and method converge. This elementary observation can then lead us, in connection with statements in the later Kierkegaard, to try to interpret the Authorship as having come about according to a pedagogically deliberate and precisely arranged plan that Kierkegaard must have established quite early. This interpretation provides a significant counterpart to Schleiermacher's noted presentation of the mutual relation of the Platonic dialogues. If we apply a similar hermeneutic principle to Kierkegaard's Authorship, it can be systematized, and we can with its aid answer the main question of this investigation concerning Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel with particular clarity and conciseness, namely by situating Hegel in his definitive place in a thus constructed Kierkegaardian system. Placement and evaluation would then, in Hegel's case and in that of others, become identical.

This approach would undeniably simplify a complex issue; but if one were to employ it consistently, there would be a not inconsiderable risk of either ignoring entirely or at least trivializing facts and problems that have had significance for the question of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel. Thus, for example, it has been evident in the previous chapters of this investigation that Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel, both as concerns his secondhand and later firsthand knowledge and understanding, and as concerns his position thereto, went through a development, which in this investigation is seen as a process of enlightenment, in which various factors, such as Kierkegaard's studies in ancient philosophy, for example, demonstrably had influence. Even if Kierkegaard was a genius, he was certainly neither a saint, apostle, nor endowed with divine foreknowledge and omniscience so that he could a priori take a definitive position toward a philosophy before he had at least penetrated it somewhat through study. Despite his totally undeniable genius and originality in certain respects, in various other respects Kierkegaard was not much different from others² for whom reading,

² Cf. for example, Frithiof Brandt's concluding statement in *Søren Kierkegaard og Pengene* [SK and Money] (1935), 159.

thought, and writing went together as far as possible. Thus it was in Kierkegaard's private notes as well as in his published works, which are "stages" on the way to enlightenment. P. A. Heiberg has maintained that Kierkegaard's story was not the story of a sickness, but rather the history of a cure.³ This thesis can also be utilized concerning Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel, provided, of course, that we emphasize equally the two elements "cure" and "history." If he was never himself especially severely attacked by the sickness, viz., speculative philosophy particularly in the version of Hegel, if he was at most exposed to its attack during a brief period in his youth and quite superficially infected here and there in his world of thought, then at least he cured himself with harsh medications of his own and others' devising, and sought through his writings to give his worthy contemporaries a drastic remedy against Hegel. In his Authorship demolition and construction [*Opbygning*] went together, and if we wish to understand this, the most relevant approach will be to follow the process step by step; that is, we must take each work individually before we can even speak of a systematic synthesis.

Since in this section of the investigation there is no intention of giving a complete presentation (either historically or systematically arranged) of Kierkegaard's world of thought, so, as in the previous chapters, in what follows a considerable amount of material in the works of Kierkegaard must be left out of the discussion. The parameters are set by the object of this study; the method is the same as has been used up to this point. The arrangement is as far as possible Kierkegaard's own, as the works are examined in the sequence in which they appeared.⁴

2. JUDGE WILLIAM'S DIRECT AND INDIRECT CRITICISM OF "SPECULATION" IN *Either/Or* II

Even in the choice of the literary form of *Either/Or* there is a clear

³ Especially in his major work: *Søren Kierkegaards religiøse Udvikling* [SK's Religious Development] (1925), particularly on the last page (377), where Heiberg sums up his study with the single word *Helbredelseshistorie*—"the history of a cure."

⁴ That the edifying and poetic works receive a less prominent place in this study than in, e.g., Geismar's, Hirsch's, Mesnard's, Anna Paulsen's, and other complete presentations of Kierkegaard's life and thought must be considered an arrangement that requires no further justification.

opposition to Hegel and his speculative disciples' predilection for the direct, pedagogical approach in monographs or textbooks. By means of this poetic work to confront the reader with an alternative between the esthetic and the ethical attitude toward life, there is a clear indication of the rejection of the speculative mode of development in which individual choice is illusory because the process originates and continues with necessity, not freedom, for the individual as well as for world history. Certainly the pseudonymity of the work—apart from much else which is significant—is a manifestation of the fact that the author did not want to appear as a professorial or other authority. Although these frequently emphasized indicators are obvious, this does not answer every question about *Either/Or* and its relation to Hegel.

The presentation of the esthetic stage (which manifests itself in several ways) in the first part of *Either/Or* closely matches the interpretation (and evaluation) of romantic irony in *On the Concept of Irony*. It is more subtle and, directly as well as indirectly, more precisely described than in Kierkegaard's thesis. With regard to the main question of the present study, the relation to Hegel, the first part of *Either/Or* is not especially problematical. The most important thing to be noted in this respect is that in his theoretical esthetics Kierkegaard rather extensively took into account the Hegelian H. G. Hotho's *Vorstudien für Leben und Kunst* [Preliminary Studies for Life and Art] (1835) and Hegel's own *Lectures on the Philosophy of Fine Art*,⁵ so that he freely took what he could find use for, and he criticized where, as a theoretical esthetician, he found it called for, and left the remainder alone. Kierkegaard did not give, and had no intention of giving, a completely developed esthetic system as a counterpart of Hegel's (or J. L. Heiberg's) in *Either/Or*.

On the other hand, in the second part of *Either/Or* a few questions occur on the relation to Hegel that require treatment.

In Judge William's first essay, "The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage" (*Either/Or*, II, 5-157), his intention is to convince the young esthete that the esthetic attitude toward life must be made into a

⁵ On this point the reader is referred to F. J. Billeskov Jansen's commentary volume, *Kierkegaards Værker i Udvælg*, IV (1950), 21 (on Hotho) and pp. 24-28 (on Hegel). In my commentary on H. Fauteck's German translation *Entweder-Oder* (*Kierkegaards ästhetisch-philosophische Schriften*, hrsgg. v. Hermann Diem u. Walter Rest), 1960, pp. 937-1025, notes will be found on the individual passages where Hegel and others are quoted or discussed.

mastered moment, as it is called in *On the Concept of Irony* (pp. 240, 256, 340, and esp. 337), i.e., the immediate, romantic infatuation with the instant must enter into a harmonious union with the enduring love of marriage and its ethical obligations.

This could appear to exemplify what Kierkegaard frequently speaks of in deprecatory terms, Hegelian reconciliation ("mediation," as Kierkegaard often puts it) of seeming opposites; and Høffding, for example, thinks that the ethical stage in Kierkegaard's poetic presentations has Hegel's concept as its most immediate basis.⁶ However there is much in Judge William's first essay which decisively speaks against such a notion.

If we leave out of consideration the systematic foundation of Hegel's concept of marriage, which he has most thoroughly treated in *Philosophy of Right* (pp. 110-122), then we can find a series of parallels and particular agreements or similarities between his and Judge William's views. However a demonstration of such parallels would not solve the problem of Judge William's possible Hegelian background or sympathies, since the specifically Hegelian and what is specifically Judge William does not consist in a panegyric of marital love, its fidelity, perseverance, etc., for we would probably have no difficulty in finding parallels both in older and more recent textbooks on Christian ethics and in literature, which there is no need to illustrate here. The difference between Hegel and the Judge consists in the foundation, which in Hegel lies in the placement of the discussion of marriage within the system as a totality, and which in Judge William is given in another way.

Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, its purpose and its place in the system (as the doctrine of the objective spirit) has already been briefly, but in this connection sufficiently, described (Chapter I, section 2). On his treatment of marriage we need only add his statement that:

Marriage contains, as the immediate type of ethical relationship, first the moment of physical vitality in its totality, namely as the actuality of the species and its process. But, secondly, in self-consciousness the natural sexual union—a union purely internal or being-in-itself [*an sich seyende*] and for that very reason only an external unity in its existence—is changed into a spiritual, a self-conscious love (p. 111).

In the following paragraphs Hegel continues with a discussion of

⁶ *Danske Filosofer* (1909), p. 158; cf. *Søren Kierkegaard som Filosof*, 2nd ed. (1919), pp. 92ff.

the subjective conditions of marriage in the special disposition of two persons for each other, and its objective condition in their free agreement to constitute one person (i.e., person juridically understood). The ethical in marriage consists in the consciousness of this unity as a substantial goal, a unity obtained by entering into marriage in compliance with existing legal and ecclesiastical rules and ceremonies (§164). Through its rationality the natural condition of the two sexes obtains its intellectual and ethical significance in monogamy, the foundation of the family, whose external reality as a juridical person is its property, its assets. Hegel discusses the family's property right in the following paragraphs, then the questions of the rearing of children and the dissolution of the family, after which he goes on to treat of civil society as a transitional stage for the perfect speculative state.

Certainly in these paragraphs Hegel rejects Kant's view of marriage as only a civil contractual relationship (§161, additions, p. 262) and Friedrich von Schlegel's encomium of free love in *Lucinda* (§164, additions, p. 263); but in Hegel there is at most only passing mention of the establishment of ethical attitudes and no mention at all of choice of personality or the personality's choice in the same sense as in Judge William in *Either/Or*.

The whole section on marriage in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* should be correctly understood, that is, in harmony with Hegel's intention, as a necessary link in the speculative development of the concept of the doctrine of the Objective Spirit, which in turn is the negation and thus only a necessary transitional point for the doctrine of the Absolute Spirit. But neither the section on marriage nor *Philosophy of Right* as a whole can, according to Hegel's fundamental concept, have any validity isolated from the system as a whole, or apart from its principles, its method, its conclusion.

In Judge William's first epistolary essay to the young esthete A, we cannot discover any corresponding foundation for his main point of view, nor has he set for himself the same goal as that of Hegel. The method that was all important for Hegel is employed only occasionally by Judge William. The agreements and parallels on particular points that we can mention here and there consequently cannot be granted essential significance.

Just by his choice of literary form alone, Judge William is un-Hegelian; he is also anti-Hegelian not only in his view on individual points but by the justification for his notion of the aesthetic validity of marriage, a justification that is certainly expressed more

clearly in his second epistolary essay but that is nevertheless also the foundation for the first.

Specific examples help to show the correctness of these statements.

"The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage" is the part of *Either/Or* that was written first, i.e., shortly after Kierkegaard's defense of his thesis,⁷ and this external circumstance contributes to an explanation of the fact that we find some reflections of Kierkegaard's reading of Hegel.

Judge William holds (*Either/Or*, II, 22ff.) that his own era has turned away from the romantic version of love, either mocking its naïve chivalry, fidelity, and especially marriage, or embracing the notion that marriage is a purely civil or rational arrangement, a marriage of convenience, thus ignoring the significance of love. While we may describe the romantic interpretation as "immediate," the two distinct interpretations of Judge William's contemporaries are to be described as "reflected." Frequently people speak of a marriage of convenience, Judge William says (*Either/Or*, II, 27); but if we want "to respect linguistic usage" (i.e., contemporary Hegelian), we really ought to call it a marriage of common sense, which belongs to the "sphere of reflection." In opposition to these two opinions, Judge William maintains that Christianity resolves the conflict between immediate and reflected love in marriage, which "essentially belongs to Christianity" (p. 29).

That this reasoning follows Hegel's pattern requires no further demonstration, nor that the Judge uses Hegelian terminology. At the same time, however, the question of the relation between the attitudes expressed by Judge William and by Hegel is not satisfactorily answered.

We can put the matter thus: if Judge William had been a genuine and consistent Hegelian, he would hardly have needed to bother producing either the first or the second letter in order to convince his young esthetical friend of the inadequacy of his stage and of the advantage of his own, because then the esthete would necessarily (in the Hegelian sense) by himself have intuited the provisional and temporary validity of his own stage and with the

⁷ On the relative dates of composition reference is made to P. A. Heiberg's *Nogle Bidrag til Enten-Ellers Tilblivelseshistorie* [Some Contributions to the History of the Genesis of *Either/Or*] (1910), whose main conclusion, which can scarcely be disputed, is that Kierkegaard wrote the esthetic portion after he wrote the ethical portion. That is, *Or* was written before *Either*.

same necessity he would have passed on to the ethical. According to Hegel, this law would have been operative both in the world historical and individual development, as, indeed, the Judge's treatise had to come into existence and to have had its effect on the unfolding of the Concept precisely in the year of Our Lord 1843. If one embraces this notion, then one is a genuine Hegelian; but Judge William is just not a spokesman for this notion. His whole reasoning process proceeds in the sphere of freedom, not in that of necessity, where the possibilities of choice are genuine, not illusory as in Hegel. Hence he must be described as essentially an un-Hegelian ethicist, even though he does use Hegelian patterns and means. Moreover, neither does the fact that he is an optimist like Hegel, although more controlled (cf. his statements on p. 341 and "The Ultimatum" itself) mean that he can be described as a Hegelian, since optimism is not sufficient to qualify a view as Hegelian. Johannes de Silentio's statement about *Fear and Trembling* "This is not the system, it has nothing whatever to do with the system" (p. 24) applies to Judge William's position even in his first essay.

In a continuation of this sequence of thought Judge William offers some comments that quite directly show him to be un-Hegelian. He says that "every generation and each individual in the generation to a certain extent begin afresh," which is unquestionably incompatible with Hegel's philosophy of history, in which every generation (and the individuals in it) simply does not begin afresh, but continues the development in which the preceding must yield.⁸

We could then ask whether Judge William's opinion that Christianity is mankind's highest development (p. 31) and that it alone makes possible the union of "all of the first erotic of love" and "Marital love" is not the same as Hegel's view. Both in Hegel's *Encyclopedia* and in his *Philosophy of Religion* Christianity is interpreted as "the absolute religion," and since for Hegel the development of mankind is identical with the self-unfolding of the divine Idea in time, the harmony, indeed, identity between Judge William's opinion and Hegel's on this main point should be evident.

In response to this, it must be pointed out that neither the harmony nor the identity between the two opinions is established merely by the designation of Christianity as the highest point of

⁸ There is a parallel here with Kierkegaard's criticism of Martensen's view on baptism in *Papirer*, V A II (not in Hong).

development when this conceptual designation is not especially Hegelian⁹ and when it does not include any specification of the content of the Christianity identified in this way.

While it is not difficult to specify the content of Hegel's notion of Christianity, especially on the basis of his philosophy of religion, in the case of Judge William one is referred to individual utterances not only in his first essay but also in his second in *Either/Or*. Only this much can be said here in a summary way: the Judge's stage is so undifferentiated that it is able harmoniously to contain within it the esthetic, the ethical, and the religious (A and B, according to the designations in the *Postscript*). The explanation for this situation must be partly that Kierkegaard had still not worked out his theory of stages as precisely and distinctly as he did later, and partly that from his "higher" ethical stage the Judge was in a position to survey the esthete's "lower" stage and present a more adequate understanding of it than the esthete A's understanding. So too, the Judge could not have had a complete insight into the religious stage, which is higher than his own, but only, as is also suggested in his introductory comments for "The Ultimatum," an understanding that his own stage was not the highest. Hence there is nothing peculiar in the fact that it is not possible to write Judge William's dogmatic theology, at least not just on the basis of his essay on "The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage," whose purpose is clearly expressed in the title, which certainly cannot be rephrased either as "The Religious (Christian) Validity of Marriage," for example, or as "The Notion of Christianity Which Must Be Presupposed So That Marriage Can Be Religiously (Christianly) Sanctioned."

If we turn now from Judge William's first epistolary essay to his second, longer, and weightier, on "The Equilibrium Between the Aesthetical and the Ethical in the Composition of Personality" (*Either/Or*, II, 161-338, hereinafter referred to as "The Equilibrium"), we again discover, as expected, the same characteristics regarding form and content as in his first; but there are several additional items of significance—significant in themselves and in relation to Hegel.

Although it is not explicitly indicated, the essay is clearly arranged into three main sections, the first of which deals with the choice, the second concerns the esthetic attitude toward life in the ethical

⁹ On this point cf., e.g., Troeltsch's treatise *Christentum und Religionsgeschichte*, 1897 (reprinted in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, II, 1913, 328ff.).

light, and the third, the ethical attitude toward life in its relation to the esthetic.¹⁰ As in Judge William's first essay so it is in the second that it is first and foremost estheticism, not Hegelian speculation, he turns against, even though at several points along the way he takes a position on the latter. In this study it is these positions which are of primary interest.

The Judge's claim, rendered against the esthete, is that rather than cultivating his mind [*Aund*] the important thing is to mature his personality (p. 166), and for the content of the personality the choice is not the esthete's indifferent either/or, but the decisive either/or (pp. 166f. and *passim*). Postponement of, or failure to make the ethical choice only entails that "then the personality chooses unconsciously, or the choice is made by obscure powers within it" (p. 168). The esthetic choice is no genuine choice (p. 171), since it is not an absolute ethical choice between good and evil. Thus the choice stands between ethical decisiveness and indecisiveness, indifference; but then it follows, the Judge continues (p. 171), that in choice it is not so much a matter of choosing the right as of the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which it is chosen. In Kierkegaard's *Papirer* terminology, that is the same as saying that Judge William asserts a pathos-filled transition (in the sphere of freedom), not just a dialectical one (in the sphere of necessity); he demands a leap. By this requirement alone Judge William separates himself completely from Hegel, in whose philosophy this does not come up at all and it is impossible for it to come up without destroying the method as well as the system. The Judge further asserts optimistically that if one has brought a man into the situation that the only way out of it consists in a choice, then that man chooses the right, i.e., he determines himself to choose ethically instead of not choosing at all or at most doing so esthetically, and then, when he has chosen to make ethical choices, he chooses rightly between good and evil (pp. 172-173).

Having come thus far, Judge William draws a significant parallel between the esthete's indifferent ethical attitude and "modern philosophy's pet theory, that the principle of contradiction is annulled" (p. 174). The esthete, he says, mediates opposites in a higher madness, philosophy (i.e., the speculative) in a higher unity; but the result is the same—the absolute opposition between good and evil illegitimately disappears for them. Surely there is this difference

¹⁰ The division is given by Hirsch in *Kierkegaard-Studien*, II (1933), 614-615.

between the esthete and the speculative philosopher, that the first is turned forward toward existence, the latter is turned backward toward history. Viewed ethically, this difference means nothing since neither the esthete nor the speculative philosopher undertakes the ethical choice. Even if one now suggests that speculative philosophy is correct in its assertion that the principle of contradiction has been annulled as far as the past is concerned (insofar as the world historical development has proceeded according to the Hegelian dialectic's rule of the resolution of relative oppositions in a higher unity, which is the point of departure for the next movement of the Idea), still this cannot hold true for the future, the Judge says, because the oppositions must first exist before they can be mediated. If the claim that the principle of contradiction has been annulled can apply only to the past, not the future, this means that the possibility of choice enters each instant and, note well, the possibility of ethical choice.

Here there is also clearly enough a complete break with Hegel's philosophy of history, which in the system follows the philosophy of right (including ethics), and in principle it could be continued with a prophecy of history, since it would be inconsistent to suggest the presence of a definite set of laws in the past until A.D. 1830, but not in the time thereafter. Judge William does not offer any counterpart to Hegel's philosophy of history in this context—that first appeared in the Climacus text *Philosophical Fragments* a good year later. But there are grounds for noting that the Judge's objection against the speculative philosophy of history, that for it "world history is concluded, and he [the speculative philosopher] mediates" is already found suggested in the previously discussed (Chapter IV, section 4) draft for a play "The Conflict Between The Old and The New Soap-Cellar" (II B 19). It is likely that Judge William alludes to the historical basis and persons satirized in this play with the later familiar quotation about the pet philosophy [*Yndlingsfilosofi*] of the age which becomes the juvenile philosophy [*Ynglingsfilosofi*] of the age (p. 176).¹¹

Judge William also objects to philosophy (i.e., speculative philosophy) because, in his view, it has confused the modern era with absolute time, and thus has also mistaken relative mediation with

absolute mediation, which cannot take place until world history is completed. If Judge William is right in holding that this confusion has taken place, this means that mediation, the vital nerve of the dialectical method and of the Hegelian system, is cut, speculation is discarded, and the system is not completed but is constantly coming into existence, which amounts to saying that the system is not a system at all but a hypothesis that cannot possibly be verified until the end of the ages. Here again Judge William's criticism adumbrates the later Authorship. This is reflected especially in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (pp. 106ff.), just as in his subsequent objection (which Kierkegaard had prepared for in the *Papirer* and worked out in more detail in the Authorship) to the effect that it seems that they, the speculative philosophers, have confused the two spheres of thought and of freedom with each other (*Either/Or*, II, 177ff.). While ethical conflict cannot exist for thought, it does exist in the realm of freedom—which is entirely left out of consideration in Hegel's philosophy, where there is, to be sure, much discussion of freedom, but only of the freedom of the absolute spirit to follow its own dialectical law, so that for Hegel freedom is identical with metaphysical necessity.

After these objections, the Judge takes the opportunity to maintain that the spheres that properly concern the philosopher are logic, nature, and history. Here necessity reigns, he says (p. 178), although he imagines that there is some difficulty with history (cf. especially the "Interlude" in *Philosophical Fragments*), a difficulty he resolves here by suggesting that the philosophy of history has as its objects only external events, not "the inward work [which] is the genuine life of freedom" (p. 178). This solution also points toward the *Postscript* (pp. 119ff.), and—just as Climacus does later—Judge William maintains that freedom, i.e., that which is the given actuality as a task for every existing individual, is a fact that speculative philosophy has nothing to do with (p. 179), it knows nothing about the impending ethical choice. In this respect there is a similarity between the esthete and the speculative philosopher: they have not discovered the reality of the fact of choice. The Judge then passes on to a more detailed account of what he understands by the ethical choice (pp. 180ff.).

In the following main section, dealing with the esthetic stage from the perspective of the ethical (pp. 180-223), Judge William once more draws a parallel between the esthete and the speculative

¹¹ This locution was used with approval by, among others, H. N. Clausen in his *Optegnelser om mit Levneds og min Tids Historie* [Notes on the History of My Life and Times] (1877), p. 213.

philosopher (pp. 215ff.)—and at this point also briefly reflects a theme developed at length in *De Omnibus Dubitandum Est* (cf. *supra*, Chapter VII, section 3).

Having described the esthete's stage as despair and urged the esthete to choose his despair and thereby choose himself "in his eternal validity," i.e., as created, concrete person with reality as the object of ethical position and activity, not as the object of speculative conceptualization and description, the Judge distinguishes between doubt [*Tvivl*] and despair [*Fortvivlelse*]: whereas doubt belongs to the realm of thought (that of logical necessity), despair is an expression of the whole personality and hence belongs to the realm of freedom, where there can be choice. The speculative philosophers, he continues, confused doubt with despair. They themselves suffer from a form of despair, which is apparent from the fact that they "divert themselves with objective thinking" (p. 216), and thereby, like the esthete, escape ethical choice, which is also a choice, albeit the wrong one. Their only possibility for a cure of the sickness of despair (from the Christian perspective a sin, which the Judge does not point out here since he is reasoning on another level) is to become revealed to oneself, i.e., to see into one's factual situation and embrace it in earnest. The Judge expresses this by saying that the task is to choose the absolute, i.e., to choose oneself in his eternal validity, which again means to choose that which is at once the most abstract and the most concrete of all: freedom (p. 218). Accepting this will lead the esthete to repentance for his sinful despair. The consequence of the Judge's thought process must be that while the esthete has, as it were, the opportunity to carry his estheticism over into the ethical stage as a mastered moment (cf. the Judge's first essay), so the speculative philosopher can save himself as a personality only by turning over his whole edifice of thought to a museum of misconceptions as a cautionary example of what existing humans ought not concern themselves with. This is almost like comparing the building of the system with the building of the Tower of Babel. Johannes de Silentio preferred to compare it with a public omnibus. (*Fear and Trembling*, p. 25).

Again in the final and largest main section (pp. 222-337), where the Judge develops the positive exposition of his ethical-religious attitude toward life in its relation to the esthetic attitude toward life, there are occasional direct criticisms of Hegel and the Hegelians; but the objections here, weighty as they are, bear the character of

parting shots, as the Judge passes on to the next point on his schedule.

It is said (p. 227) that philosophy—which here as always in the essay means speculative philosophy—could seem to have abolished the principle of contradiction. It could surely have done this in the realm of thought, but not in the sphere of ethical reality. Even if philosophy cannot conceive of an absolute contradiction, it does not follow that there is no such thing, and if there is such a thing—as Judge William insists throughout—then this is sufficient proof that the chief thesis of Hegelian philosophy, the identity of thought and being, has been refuted by an ethical fact that belongs to the sphere of freedom, not that of necessity.

With that, on every point that was important to him, Judge William has directly criticized, not just corrected Hegel. It becomes abundantly clear that as thinkers they are totally divergent in points of departure, methods, and conclusions.

Just as at the end of his thesis Kierkegaard let it be known that he had deliberately dealt with his topic only within a sharply limited point of view, so also both from Judge William's Introduction to "The Ultimatum" and from the sermon itself we get an unmistakable manifestation of the—optimistic—ethical stage the Judge is a spokesman for, which is the only one, or the highest one.

If we have observed how the Judge distances himself not only from the esthete but also from speculative philosophy, it must appear strange that several scholars over the years have wished to maintain that there are important similarities between the points of view in the "The Equilibrium" and those of Hegel,¹² particularly in the notion of how the transition from the esthetic position to the ethical occurs and the notion of "the universal." Knud Hansen, in particular, in his large critical exposition *Søren Kierkegaard, Ideens Digter* (1954, pp. 82ff.) has presented this interpretation, which seems plausible indeed, although it can hardly withstand criticism.

A single little word in Knud Hansen indicates that he has understood neither Hegel nor Kierkegaard correctly, i.e., according to their own meaning. That word is "only," which apparently for Knud Hansen should signify something less essential. What is for him less essential was for Kierkegaard, at least, all important.

Knud Hansen asserts that, in "The Equilibrium," it is not said

¹² Valter Lindström in *Stadiernas teologi* (1943), pp. 243ff., mentions a few of the earlier scholars.

"how there is a passage from the negative to the positive, from despair over the temporal self [the esthetical] to the conception of the self in its eternal validity." This is not said, Knud Hansen continues, because it obviously did not need to be said:

The thought seems to be [that] when only the will oppressed with despair strains itself to the utmost by despairing completely, the change comes of itself: the negative changes into the positive.

Thus, just as Diem in his book (1929), Knud Hansen finds that this dialectic of the will of the Judge is "very strongly related to the dialectic of thought in Hegel." To be sure, notice is correctly taken of the fact that Kierkegaard later rejected this notion of the process by which a person finds himself according to his eternal condition; but the conclusion is drawn there that Kierkegaard (here in "The Equilibrium") is "depending on the Hegelian dialectic which he combats; he has only moved it from one area to another, from thought over to passion."

This "moving" of the problematic from the sphere of necessity to that of freedom, to use Kierkegaard's terminology again, is quite important, for it implies the change from a quantitative to a qualitative dialectic, which means that we can speak only of a pathos-filled transition, i.e., a leap, no longer of the dialectic, and that rules out that "the change comes of itself." The Judge does not assert that either, and Knud Hansen also says quite correctly that "The thought seems [for Knud Hansen] to be . . ." etc., to which we can respond that certainly Kierkegaard sketches Judge William as someone with not a little optimism and confidence in his own convincing and persuasive capacities. But Judge William does not express the notion that any esthete (in the Kierkegaardian sense) at all after reading the Judge's essay will necessarily become convinced and turn into an ethicist of the Judge's fashioning, so that the conversion must needs come from himself. He says that it can happen and ought to happen *if* the esthete himself chooses and wills it. We can add, *unless* this is the Judge's meaning, then all his talk about choice and responsibility in the strict sense is meaningless—just as it is in Hegelian philosophy, which, according to Kierkegaard's later objection, has no ethics because everything without exception happens with an inviolable metaphysically grounded necessity.

The next point, the designation of the ethical as "the universal"

also belongs to a disputed area in Kierkegaard scholarship. Here, as is generally the case with studies of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel, if one isolates individual words, concepts and more restricted conceptual contexts in Kierkegaard and in Hegel, one can without the slightest difficulty find a multiplicity of verbal correspondences, simply because Kierkegaard to a large degree still used the speculative vocabulary of his contemporaries, and one can from the terminological similarities draw hasty conclusions from verbal to real correspondences. In addition, while Kierkegaard scholars who obviously try to incorporate suitable hermeneutical references not only to the more immediate context but also of the wider context in Kierkegaard (that is: the word, the sentence, the section, the chapter, the works as a whole, the work's situation and its thus given function in the Authorship), we find only rarely the same reference taken in their understanding of Hegel.

Knud Hansen's exposition can again be mentioned as an example, and with respect to this point as an example of a presentation of Judge William's (Kierkegaard's) conception of the ethical, which is certainly clear and correct in a great many things, but which suffers from a slight defect that leads to a not quite accurate determination of the relation to Hegel.

Like earlier scholars,¹³ Knud Hansen says (*Kierkegaard*, p. 83) that the very expression "the universal" is derived from Hegel, "who by the universal understands human moral conduct as it takes shape in family life, civil society, and above all in the state." Naturally, he is thinking of *Philosophy of Right* here. He goes on to say, quite admirably, that in Judge William's essay the expression is used in two senses, viz., both in reference to the universal validity of the ethical claim and the life of civil society as a representative of that claim. So far, so good. Then Knud Hansen carries this out further when he emphasizes (p. 86) quite correctly that the relation to the universal in Judge William is different from what it is in Hegel: "While this relation in Hegel is determined in a purely compulsory way from the demand for the individual's immersion in 'the common life of civil society'" as it is called with a quote from Kuno Fischer's presentation of Hegel's philosophy, "the Kierkegaardian ethicist understands how to use the relation to win freedom for himself," and a little further on Knud Hansen correctly asserts (pp. 90-91) that it is a mistake to think of Judge William as a representative of Hegel's ethics.

¹³ E. g., Himmelstrup in *Terminologisk Ordbog* . . . (2nd ed., 1964), p. 13.

Here is the slight defect previously mentioned. It is quite correct that Judge William cannot rightly be said to be a representative of Hegel's ethics. But strictly speaking no one can be said to be a representative of Hegel's ethics, simply because in Hegel's system there is no ethics and none can be discovered there. Earlier in the present study (Chapter V, section 3b) it was said of Hegel, by way of interpretation, that his system is correctly seen as a reasoning process built out of an experience of the divine cosmos, hence a description that reports in direct form, "direct communication" as Kierkegaard put it, and consistently is communicated in the indicative. Only as an inconsistency can Hegel use the imperative, without which there can be no talk of ethics, but only of moral psychology and moral sociology. In addition, one must distinguish between the origin of the ethical requirement and the point (the situation) wherein it demands fulfillment. On this point Valter Lindström's previously mentioned presentation is clearer than Knud Hansen's.

Judge William himself says in his little introduction to "The Ultimatum" that the Jutland pastor "in this sermon [has] apprehended, what I said . . . [and] expressed it more felicitously than I find myself capable of doing."

What the sermon insists upon is "the edification contained in the thought that against God we are always in the wrong" (p. 343). The text for the sermon is Luke 19:41ff.: just as we must understand that the destruction of Jerusalem was a punishment that severely afflicted both guilty and innocent people at that time, so also all men must learn not to approach God as if we were in the right but accept the fact that against God we are always in the wrong. Only in this way can we designate the perfection of man as man, man's special position within creation. But at the same time it is made clear that the certainty of the fact that God is always right, man wrong, is not gained by the way of contemplation, the way of thought. It is gained only by means of love, i.e., that of freedom, by which the infinite qualitative difference between God and man becomes clear. And because certainty is achieved in this way of love and freedom, doubt is excluded and action is stimulated, and it is stressed that the thought that as against God we are always in the wrong means that God's love is always greater than human love (*Either/Or*, II, 354-355), which is an edifying truth, i.e., a truth that builds up a human's existence.^a

^a In the Danish there is an obvious connection between the adjective *opbyggelig* (which I have translated as "edifying") and the verb *at bygge*

This sermon quite closely parallels Judge William's insistence that the esthete should choose himself in his eternal validity, namely as a responsible creature with a concrete existence as a task. The sermon contains a point of view that would later be more precisely developed by Kierkegaard and which is as un-Hegelian, indeed indirectly anti-Hegelian, as possible, both in the concept of God that dominates it and in the view of man to which it gives expression. For Hegel—as for all idealistic thinkers—there was no infinite qualitative difference between God and man. For Hegel man's perfection was not to be seen in his unrighteousness (and impotence) but in his righteousness (and omnipotence).

Finally, there is reason to note that in the preparatory work for *Either/Or* (*Papirer*, III B 31-192)^b there are individual remarks in this context. Reference is made (III B 41, 8, p. 130)^c to Karl Rosenkranz's *Kritische Erläuterungen des Hegel'schen Systems* [Critical Elucidation of the Hegelian System] (1840), in connection with the discussion of woman as an imperfect being (*Either/Or*, II, 49-50). In the place cited, Rosenkranz polemicizes against J. H. Pabst's *Der Mensch und seine Geschichte* [Man and His History] (1830), to whose obviously very narrow-minded discussion of the sexual aspect of marriage Rosenkranz took strong exception: "The Holy Ghost" Rosenkranz says (p. 309),

is certainly neither male nor female; we Protestants know that as well as Herr Pabst; but we men cannot deny the sexual life, and marriage exterminates lust in it, is subordinated to the spiritual relation and sanctifies the life of nature.

Shortly after the above entry in the *Papirer* (at III B 41, 22, p. 132)^d there is a reference to Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* "Introduction," pp. 135f., where Hegel discusses doubt. Judge William distinguishes (*Either/Or*, II, 96-97) between a personal and a scientific doubt, and thinks (in the draft III B 41, 22) that it is only the latter that Hegel advocates, on which point he may be right, although in the place cited Hegel speaks of "the way of doubt . . . or more properly a way of despair" for the science that is about to

op, or *opbygge*, to construct, build up, or edify. Professor Hong prefers to translate *opbyggelig* literally, and quite correctly, as "upbuilding," but I consider this inelegant in English.

^b A few of these entries will be found in various volumes of Hong, *Journals and Papers*.

^c Not in Hong.

^d Not in Hong.

manifest itself. Two other entries in the drafts (III B 179, 60, p. 206, and III B 179, 63, pp. 208-209)^e on the tautology and on the principle of contradiction are dealt with by Kuhr in the work referred to previously (cf. *supra*, Chapter III, section 5, note 11). III B 192^f contains a devastating description "of the present condition of philosophy": whereas the rationalists in "The first epoch worked toward the sound understanding of man and achieved it as well," then "philosophy today abandons more and more this relative superficiality in order to reach something higher."

Just as in the preparatory drafts for *Either/Or* we discover individual comments of interest in this context, so in the more complete entries Kierkegaard made after its publication (IV B 19-59)^g we find important statements of how he himself wished the work to be understood. Kierkegaard had been extremely irritated by Heiberg's discussion of *Either/Or* in *Intelligensblade*, as a series of witticisms and attacks (IV B 26-59)^h shows; but it is mainly "Victor Eremita's" lengthy "Post-Scriptum" (IV B 59, March 1844)ⁱ which is important. He takes particular notice there of

a deception in the book: a movement is attempted, which cannot be made, or at least not in that way; the Judge has undoubtedly noticed it himself, I cannot believe otherwise. Since he had it as a task only to delimit an ethical view, such a deception was unavoidable.

The deception spoken of is elucidated later in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (pp. 229-231) as follows: The Judge gave the impression that man in despairing can in that very despair find himself without divine aid. But the truth is that by himself man can undertake only one part of the double movement, not the other. "Victor Eremita" does not pass up the opportunity to ironize over the fact that the reviewers of *Either/Or* have not noticed this limitation in Judge William's position.

3. THE Eighteen Edifying Discourses

Just as there was little intention under the preceding points of this

^e Neither of these are in Hong.

^f Hong, III, #3288. This entry is another fine example of the extraordinary satirical talent of Kierkegaard.

^g A few of these will be found in Hong, vols. IV and V.

^h A few of these will be found in Hong, vols. III, IV, and V.

ⁱ Hong, V, #5710.

study to present a complete treatment of the esthetic and ethical stages according to *Either/Or*, so also under the present heading we do not intend to give an exhaustive account of the religious stage such as it is sketched in Kierkegaard's collection of edifying discourses. Only that which directly and indirectly has significance for an understanding of the relation to Hegel and speculative idealism as a school of thought within the philosophy of religion will be considered here.¹⁴

If we wish to compare the *Eighteen Edifying Discourses*, which Kierkegaard published in 1843 and 1844, three sets each year with two, three, or four discourses in each, and which he then collected under a common title page in 1845, with others, then in the present study it would be most relevant to take Hegel's few extant sermons from his Tübinger period (1792-1793),¹⁵ if it would not be somewhat unfair to compare the quite young Hegel's first—and not continued—efforts in this area with the expert and masterful preacher Kierkegaard was from the start. There is no satisfactory reason for including other preachers here. If one wished to do that, we should first and foremost discuss Mynster, and secondly Martensen.¹⁶ Even if we do not find any originality evident in Kierkegaard's *Edifying Discourses* either in style or form, in their calm, progressive reflections on the themes chosen, it would be quite incorrect to think that Kierkegaard was a pedantic writer of sermons [*Postilrytter*]. He could have been outstanding.

Nor is there reason to devote much attention to the question of the correct designation for these discourses. In the first draft of the preface for the first two, Kierkegaard called them simply sermons (IV B 143);¹ but because he was not ordained and, as he constantly

¹⁴ In neither the earlier nor in the more recent Kierkegaard scholarship has anyone devoted to these collections of edifying discourses approximately as much attention as to the pseudonymous Authorship. Hirsch in his *Kierkegaard-Studien*, II (1933), 623ff., 649ff., 658ff., and 719ff., was the first to have analyzed them. The first two discourses were very perspicaciously treated by Sløk in the article "Das Verhältnis des Menschen zu seiner Zukunft" [Man's Relation to His Future] (in *Orbis Litterarum*, XVIII, 1963, 60-79).

¹⁵ These are printed in Johannes Hoffmeister's edition of *Dokumente zu Hegels Entwicklung* [Documents on Hegel's Development] (1936), 175-192.

¹⁶ Kierkegaard's collection of sermons (Ktl. 211-252) was not large and contained no rarities; earlier editions of St. John Chrysostom, Tauler, and Luther, contemporaneous editions of Bindsbøll, Grundtvig (*Søndags-Bog*), Martensen, Mynster, Schleiermacher, and of his acquaintance, P. J. Spang, are the most important.

¹ Not in Hong.

said of himself, "without authority," he changed the designation to "edifying discourses." Here is already an indication of the notion of the ordination that he later amplified. There is another equally important reason for not using the designation "sermons" for these discourses, that is, as it is said in the *Postscript* (p. 229) that the discourses "only employ ethical categories of immanence, not the doubly reflected religious categories in the paradox." Hirsch was not inclined to recognize these explanations (*Kierkegaard-Studien* II, 623ff.), especially not that of Climacus in the *Postscript*; to which it can be said, with regard to the first point, that it does not indicate any penetrating understanding of Kierkegaard's notion of ordination and of the priestly office at that time when Hirsch writes that SK means by this "the external [consideration], that he is still without ordination and office." Kierkegaard did not have the prevailing concept of ordination and office as something only external, which in the context must mean unimportant formalities. Kierkegaard's reflections throughout several years on whether he ought to and dared to become a priest shows that his conception was different from the usual. Just one entry like VIII 1 A6 (1847):^k "a sermon presupposes a priest (ordination), [while] the Christian discourse [that is, not just the edifying] can be [delivered or written by] an ordinary man," says enough in this context against accepting Hirsch's explanation. With regard to the second point, we can say of Hirsch's comment that "now here there is . . . a fog to be lifted, which Johannes Climacus has blown over the state of affairs" that even if Climacus's explanation is later and reflects the fully developed theory of stages, still it is quite erroneous to call it a smoke screen that might obscure the actual situation. The designation "edifying discourses" is neither an expression of false modesty on the part of Kierkegaard nor a false description of the contents. On the contrary it is a quite accurate description of the contents when we consider that, for Kierkegaard, "to edify" simply means to build the individual's existence up in authenticity. Thus it is an expression situated within the same sphere of meaning as Judge William's imperative that one should choose himself in his eternal validity.

As a motto over all eighteen edifying discourses we could, in line with Kierkegaard's often free style of writing, put the statement that strength is perfected in powerlessness. The discourses lead up to and include religiousness A, to use the language of the *Postscript*, and

^k Hong, I, #638.

they point toward and give a fleeting glimpse of religiousness B, which provides an absolute standard and gives the full explanation of the interpretation of existence contained in the eighteen edifying discourses, and which is such—and this is what is significant for the purpose of the present study—that it excludes the view of Hegelian philosophy about man's actual situation, its goal and its inherent possibility of reaching that goal. Some examples will be sufficient to show this.

The discourses are completely devoid of direct polemic.

If we read the first two, which appeared on May 16, 1843, then it is correct, as Sløk says in a more recent terminology than Kierkegaard's ("Das Verhältnis . . .," p. 60), that both discourses will disclose the fundamental traits of human existence, that it is immersed in time and that man is human, rightly understood, only when he sees his own future before his eyes, engages himself in it, but does not lose himself in it. Faith alone can rescue him from perdition—or the aimlessness of an uncertain future, and in that way faith is the only unconditioned good, qualitatively distinct from all other goods, and for the same reason faith is the only thing that one can desire unconditionally—but not give—for another human.

It is enough to mention these features here. Sløk says, quite correctly, in the conclusion of his article (p. 79) that the first two discourses give the edifying solution to the problem that Judge William had failed to notice; but that is less significant in the present context.

Now had, if not Hegel himself, then a speculative author of edifying pieces written on the same theme as Kierkegaard, everything would have been different: human existence would not have been interpreted as immersed in time but as a necessary moment in the world-historical, inexorable unfolding. The future would not be understood to be unknown, but as foreseen, and faith would not be explained as the only unconditioned good, but as an imperfect dimension that is to become automatically superseded by the speculative concept.

If we next take the second discourse in the set Kierkegaard issued on December 6, 1843,¹ for which the text is the one he so frequently

¹ *Edifying Discourses*, 2 vols., trans. David F. Swenson and Lilian Marvin Swenson (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), I, 150-167. In the sequel, volume and page references will be to this edition. For conversion to the pagination of the earlier four-volume edition of the same translation, see Alastair McKinnon, *The Kierkegaard Indices*, I (Leiden:

preferred (James 1:17-22; Every good and every perfect gift is from above, etc.), we can make a similar observation.

It is said that the condition of Paradise was ruptured by the Fall into sin, when man ate from the tree of knowledge, and "what happened then in the beginning of the days is repeated constantly in every generation and in the individual" (I, 152—cf. *The Concept of Dread*, p. 26). Man became frightened, fell into doubt and found no escape before it was revealed, again, that only God can really console, which also became a seed of doubt. The question is raised anew: what, then, is the good? and the answer resounds that God is the immutable love who gives good gifts. Doubt has no place here, it is not overcome by man himself, by neither intellect nor will, but only by the divine miracle. To need a good and perfect gift thus entails a perfection in man, i.e., it belongs to the definition of man to need a good and perfect gift, which man cannot give himself or any other man. This first becomes clear to a man after an upheaval, a new beginning, which man cannot accomplish himself (cf. *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 23f.). In harmony with this it is said of doubt in this discourse (I, 165) that "the untrue doubt doubts about everything, only not about itself, the salvific doubt doubts only about itself with the aid of Faith."

The following discourse (I, 168-189)—on the same text—emphasizes, consistently enough, all men's similarity in the relation to God, especially the similarity that all men have the humble fate that they must receive and only be able to respond with thanksgiving, and in the fourth and last discourse in this set (I, 190-210) on the text: secure your souls in patience (Luke 21:19). This verse is interpreted along the same lines as Judge William's invitation to choose oneself in one's eternal validity. But the significant point in this discourse is the emphasis on the fact that the rightful owner of a man's soul is God, and that man's task is to acquire his soul from the unrightful owner ("the world") through God by himself (I, 199), and that the patience is not brought along as a postulate but comes into existence during the acquisition.

What is meant by patience is probed in greater depth in the two following discourses, which appeared on March 5, 1844 (I, 211-239; II, 25-51). For the purposes of the present treatment, we can highlight the emphasis in these two discourses on the fact that "the

E. J. Brill, 1970), xii. A selection of some of the *Discourses* (but not including the one presently under discussion) will be found in *Edifying Discourses* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958).

error of the doubter or despairer does not lie in knowledge, for knowledge can decide nothing with certitude . . . the error lies in the will" (II, 36). In the set of three edifying discourses that appeared on June 8, 1844, a few days before *Philosophical Fragments* and *The Concept of Dread*, we should especially note (in the discourse on II Corinthians 4:17-19; the expectation of an eternal blessedness) that this expectation should help a man to understand himself in temporality (II, 83-84; cf. the first of the eighteen discourses). Quite in line with the other discourses it is said furthermore (II, 95) that eternal blessedness is expected by God's grace, which does not have any finite condition, as for example deeds, definite manifestations, or feelings, but only the faith as a non-finite condition.

That man's perfection consists in his powerlessness over against God resounds repeatedly and very strongly in this discourse, which especially points forward to the Christian, the discourse on John the Baptist's statement as recorded in John 3:30: my joy is complete, he must increase, I must decrease (II, 101-119), completely in harmony with the first discourse in the last set issued (August 31, 1844), in which it is stressed that to need God is man's highest perfection (II, 120). In the case of earthly things it holds true that we should minimize our needs as much as possible, and the less we need, the more perfect we are. In relation to God, however, it is precisely the opposite: the more we need God, the more perfect we are (II, 128). This relation makes life more difficult, but insofar as a man does not know himself in such a way that he realizes that he is capable of almost nothing, he really does not, in a deeper sense, acknowledge that God exists (II, 154).

The last discourses in the group from August 31 carry forward and make more precise the ideas in the previous ones: in the discourse on the thorn in the flesh (II, 161-185), Kierkegaard does not offer consolation, but the horror of the thorn in the flesh as an inward suffering, which in each and every person is the contradiction of the spirit's ineffable blessedness.

In the following discourse (II, 186-222), he speaks against cowardice, a mistaken type of self-love. Finally, in the last discourse (II, 223-253) he treats the righteous man praying—he strives in prayer and conquers—in that God conquers. God is immutable and immutably the same, man can be changed. This is in line with the theme in "The Ultimatum" that against God man is always in the wrong, which is neither a scientific nor a philosophic (speculative)

truth, but an edifying truth for the individual—which is every individual, i.e., all and each. There is a clear and straight line from this theme to the thesis of the *Postscript*, that subjectivity is untruth (p. 185).

There is actually not one single directly polemical statement against Hegelian speculation in the eighteen edifying discourses. But the whole understanding of the transcendent, omnipotent, and all-loving God and of the powerless human expressed in the discourses is such that the way of speculation means for Kierkegaard the broad road to perdition, since it proceeds from a theory of man's omnipotence, which is totally incompatible with the anthropology expressed by Kierkegaard. *Either/Or* and the eighteen edifying discourses can be said to correspond to the stream of thought in the Epistle to the Romans 1:18-3:20—the whole world stands in a condition of guilt over against God, and no man is truly innocent. Just as little as Paul stopped with that conclusion, did Kierkegaard stop there. The continuation was plotted out and already begun before the last edifying discourses appeared.

Indications of what direction the continuation would take are already found in Kierkegaard's trial sermon (*Papirer* IV C 1,^m delivered on March 24, 1844, in Trinity Church on I Corinthians 2:6-9) and the *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*ⁿ he published the day before the appearance of *Stages on Life's Way*, i.e., April 29, 1845. In the *Three Discourses* there is good reason to call attention to the penitential address [*Skriftetalen*] on the theme "What it Means to Seek God";^o but just as in the edifying discourses it is entirely devoid of polemic, and as in the edifying discourses it speaks from a position that excludes the possibility of a speculative understanding of God and of man.

4. *Fear and Trembling* AND *Repetition*

The main purpose of *Either/Or* was not to combat Hegel but estheticism, and to set forth an ethical view that even in its given confines could be employed critically against both estheticism and speculative idealism, which eventually Kierkegaard variously labeled "modern philosophy," "Speculation," or simply "the System."

^m Hong, IV, #3916.

ⁿ Published in English as *Thoughts on Crucial Situations in Human Life*, trans. David F. Swenson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1941).

^o Pages 1-41.

The reflections in the two books, which came out on the same day, *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*, lie—according to the criterion in the *Postscript*—on a higher plane than *Either/Or*. In the two later books issues are raised and solutions are given into which Judge William could have no insight on his stage.

Both books are polemical against Hegel and his adherents; but they are so mainly indirectly, clearly only by their form and style, although direct criticism is also expressed.

Briefly it can be said that neither of the two books seems to show that before and while he was writing them Kierkegaard had enlarged or deepened his purely factual knowledge of Hegel's own works. What he already knew was enough for him, and he only occasionally consulted one or another of them, for the sake of confirmation, as it were. The explanation for this situation is probably simply that the more he became occupied with the development of his own Authorship, the less other thoughts and sets of problems meant to him in reality: they lost interest for him since he found very little he could positively use himself. An original mind like Hamann he could respect, and likewise Lessing; but only Socrates impressed him unqualifiedly.¹⁷

In its problematic itself *Fear and Trembling* is un-Hegelian and in its solutions anti-speculative,¹⁸ so that it is evident that these questions have no place in the total system.

The polemical tendency is already clear in the preface, which was not sent out without an intended recipient, but was especially meant for Martensen.

It had been Martensen, in his lectures on the introduction to spec-

¹⁷ Perhaps it would be appropriate to point out that through the years this became a more notable tendency—that only now and then did Kierkegaard concern himself seriously with other thinkers. But this is not a trait unique to Kierkegaard. We can find the same tendency in other authors, for example, Karl Barth, whose *Prolegomena zur kirchlichen Dogmatic* is filled with polemics against nearly everything and everybody, whereas the last volume of his *Dogmatics* is indirectly polemical and only occasionally takes direct account of one or another recent book.

¹⁸ With regard to details, reference is made to my notes on Jungbluth's German translation in the volume *Die Krankheit zum Tode und Anderes* [*Sickness unto Death and Other Works*], (1956), pp. 654ff., as well as to the notes in my Danish edition of the book (2nd edition, 1963). In the Introduction to the latter edition I have provided a discussion (pp. 7-22) of the book's relation to Hegel, to which reference is made here. Since I have nothing important to change or add to this Introduction, this book is discussed quite briefly in the present work.

ulative dogmatics (cf. *supra*, Chapter III, section 4), who had stressed Descartes and his methodical doubt. Kierkegaard's first encounter with this attempt at a speculative interpretation of the history of modern philosophy was sketched in his "Battle Between the Old and the New Soap Cellar" (*supra*, Chapter IV, section 4). Kierkegaard's first reaction after having read Descartes himself we have in *De Omnibus Dubitandum Est* (*supra*, Chapter VII, section 3), and his approximately simultaneous resolution of the problem of doubt (and despair) is to be found in Judge William's second essay in *Either/Or*, volume II. Here in the preface to *Fear and Trembling* new significant comments emerge. The first (p. 22) says that Descartes—unlike his late parroters—"did what he said and said what he did." The second points out that Descartes did not doubt in matters of faith (so as to grasp it speculatively later) and finally, the last says that Descartes modestly acknowledged "that his method had importance only for himself"¹⁹—and not without qualification for others, for posterity.

It was Martensen, above all whom Kierkegaard knew, who was unwilling to remain stationary at either doubt or faith, but who wanted "to go further," namely to a secure knowledge and a speculative conceptualization of faith, which would be set forth as something given.

Johannes de Silentio also permits himself the luxury to doubt, not about faith, but about the speculative theologians' right to refer to Descartes, of their right to go further than Hegel himself, of their speculative conceptualization of faith. His response is that their right to appeal to Descartes is mighty dubious, their attempt to go further than Hegel himself is a hopeless misunderstanding since Hegel himself pursued this road to its end, and a speculative concept of faith is a concept of something other than authentic faith and is therefore an explaining away. Thus, their supposed advance was a retreat. The speculative theologians, especially Martensen, overturned the proper rank order so that they placed faith lower than (speculative) knowledge. On the contrary, Johannes de Silentio maintains that the faith he speaks of, the pre-Christian as we may call it, is already higher than knowledge. This faith is paradoxical, and only faith so understood can contain the possibility of an exception, which Abraham is, and the intelligibility [*Forstaaelse*] of the double movement of infinity, which Judge William still thought

¹⁹ Cf. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, parts I and III.

could be undertaken by man himself in the penitence of choosing oneself in his eternal validity, as has been said.

If faith is such, and if there is such a believer (Abraham), then we can raise the three questions, as Johannes de Silentio formulates them, of whether there is a teleological suspension of the ethical, whether there is such a thing as an absolute duty toward God, and whether Abraham's silence was ethically defensible, and we can, as Johannes de Silentio does, answer all three affirmatively. If we do not share his interpretation of faith, of the possibility of a special revelation, and of the possibility of man's becoming an isolated exception, then with Hegel we should have to answer the same questions negatively.¹⁹ We can add that if speculative thought cannot explain the case of Abraham, that which otherwise maintains that it is able to conceive absolutely everything without any exception whatsoever, then it is not actual reality that something is wrong with, it is the system that is incomplete and the method that is faulty, as artistically perfect as both parts are elaborated. We can add furthermore, that the individual's, the existing man's task then becomes not to go beyond faith to a speculative concept, but, on the contrary, to return back. Especially in *Philosophical Fragments* and in *The Concept of Dread* Kierkegaard showed how this return was to be undertaken. In the present context, however, *Fear and Trembling* has the special significance that it looks away from the way of speculation as a way of delusion only in the domain of ethics, not to mention that of faith.

Repetition is an attack on speculation from another angle and with other weapons.²⁰

The book is deliberately confusing, with its lengthy segments speaking of inauthentic types of repetition, their possibility and impossibility. Only in short passages and comments does it speak of

¹⁹ Even if obviously from positions other than that of Hegel we can also answer especially the first one negatively, cf. for example, the otherwise mutually diverse responses of Martin Buber (in the article "Upphävande av etiken" [The Annulment of Ethics] in the anthology edited by R. N. Anshen translated into Swedish with the title *En etik, en värld* [One Ethics, One World], 1956, pp. 93-97), and of Søren Holm in his *Kristelig Etik* [Christian Ethics] (1963), pp. 188f.

²⁰ I have given information about details in this work in note 18 *supra* (referring to pp. 683ff. of the German translation). The best introduction to the problematic of this book with particular reference to the relation to Hegel is given by Gregor Malantschuk in his edition of the work (1961), pp. 5-10.

genuine repetition, the religiously motivated sort, while at the same time the chief character of the book, the young man, although he tends toward the religious stage, is existing on a poetic level with a problematical relation to the ordinary everyday reality as a task and at the same time the pseudonymous author, Constantine Constantius, does not stand on a stage where repetition in its genuine meaning is possible either, although he understands what conditions it requires.

Repetition is important in the present context both for the fact that we find a new category developed there and for the fact that it was discussed by Heiberg in such a way that Kierkegaard seized the opportunity in a detailed draft of a response to Heiberg (*Papirer*, IV B 100-124)⁹ to develop his theory of repetition more completely than in the book itself and to do it in such a way that the difference from a Hegelian notion was made clear.²¹

Most of *Repetition* deals with inauthentic forms of repetition, their impossibility, and the various unsuccessful attempts to obtain them pursued nevertheless whether by the book's hero, the young man, or by its author, Constantine Constantius. The explanation for the hopelessness of the inauthentic repetitions is suggested at the beginning of the book and at the end.

The young man in love, for whom Constantine became a confidant, could undertake only the movement of recollection, not that of repetition, i.e., he remained in the Greek "ethnic" sphere, remained a "poetic existence," an esthete, who was not—to use the language of Judge William now—able to choose himself in his eternal validity and realize the universal, and was thereby, in this respect, no further advanced than the speculative thinkers who distracted themselves from the given reality as a task. The young man

⁹ Only one small portion of these entries (IV B 118:1) will be found in Hong, II, #1246.

²¹ Although Hegel's (and the Hegelians') concept of philosophy and science, including their anthropology, generally speaking is quite different from modern concepts, for example, that of empiricism or philosophy and science, and Kierkegaard's is again different, in his development of the category of repetition there is precisely a point where Kierkegaard's objections to using "the categories of nature" in the sphere of freedom implies criticism of any modern thought, which like Hegel's wishes to employ what are, according to Kierkegaard's interpretation, unsatisfactory and irrelevant categories to define and explain phenomena that simply cannot be explained within a total view like the idealistic or the empiricistic. A psychology on biological foundations would, by that very fact, be a chimera for Kierkegaard.

"did not understand repetition" Constantine says with a regretful, matter-of-fact statement (p. 49). Then Constantine himself attempted a repetition, i.e., a repetition in an inauthentic sense (= a reliving) through a journey to Berlin, where he had been before (like Kierkegaard himself). Everything was a disappointment for him: the journey (p. 54), his former lodgings (pp. 54-56), the visit to the theater (pp. 73-74), the restaurant (p. 75) where everything was so terribly unchanged that here a horrible type of repetition was possible, and because of spring cleaning his home was so frightfully changed that repetition was entirely impossible here. The journey was not worth the trouble. There is no repetition, Constantine says (pp. 76, 77).

These attempts at (inauthentic types of) repetition were obviously doomed to fail from the start. Just as recollection triumphed in the young man (p. 49) and thereby cut him off from genuine repetition, so recollection stifled the counterfeit attempt at repetition for Constantine (p. 75).

Then follows the second half of the work, titled again "Repetition" (p. 82ff.), and twice, but also only these two times, it is said explicitly that repetition has taken place, namely, first for Job, who became reconciled and received everything back twofold: "this is what is called a *repetition*" (p. 117), and the second time when the young man read in the newspaper that the girl to whom he had been engaged had married someone else: "here I have the repetition" (p. 125).

On the question of when this (genuine) repetition occurs, the young man answers quite candidly that it cannot be said easily in human terms (p. 117). It comes like a "thunderclap" for Job as for himself, "when all conceivable human certitude and probability pronounced it impossible"—then it became the reality. Through repetition Job was restored to his old reality, as the young man was restored to his, which was and remains a poetic existence—although he had hoped for another. If he had had a deeper religious background, Constantine says in his explanation (p. 136), then he would not have become a poet, an exception, albeit not a genuine exception, i.e., a religious exception (p. 134). The unjustified exception will evade the universal, the justified exception is reconciled with it.

Thus *genuine* repetition is described in the poetic parts of the work as a thunderstorm. In Constantine's theoretical elucidations, as well as in Kierkegaard's rejoinders to Heiberg in the *Papirer*, it is described in other terms—"repetition is and remains a tran-

scendence" (p. 90). The meaning is the same, and repetition in this sense is inconceivable within the Hegelian system, in which the transcendent is made immanent—as Heiberg's article on "Det astronomiske Aar" [The astronomical year],²² among others, presents it.

Heiberg says there, after having quoted Constantine's introductory remarks, that this is "very true and very beautiful, if we understand it with the appropriate qualification," which Goethe provided for him. This qualification consists precisely in only wishing to call repetition in the world of nature (the cycles, the seasons of the year, etc.) repetition, and to confine man's ("subjectivity's") task to reliving, thus—according to Constantine's (and Kierkegaard's) meaning—only to speak of fatuous [*aandsforladte*] repetitions in nature and to speak inauthentically of repetition in the human. In this way then, the qualification claimed becomes an expression of an unjustified extension of the mechanistic interpretation of nature so as also to include man as a totality. In Kierkegaard's view this is the fundamental mistake in Heiberg, regardless of the source of the mistake: whether he had produced it himself or unthinkingly derived it from Goethe or from Hegel himself. Repetition as "a transcendence," as "a thunderclap," as it actually took place in two instances, cannot be incorporated into the Heibergian (Hegelian) conceptual world at all, which means (cf. *Fear and Trembling*) that speculative philosophy comes up short against reality, which it asserts it will and can conceive completely without anything left out [*begribe restløst*].

In *Repetition* (as well as in the rebuttal to Heiberg's criticism) the sphere of speculative knowledge is delimited in relation to the sphere of faith. In that respect this work points toward *The Concept of Dread*, whose introduction describes the contents of the two spheres in more detail.

5. *The Concept of Dread and Philosophical Fragments*

The direct and indirect polemic against Hegel was continued and elaborated in the two major works, *Philosophical Fragments*, which appeared on June 13, 1844, and *The Concept of Dread*, which came out on June 17 in the same year. The chronological sequence here

²² The article (in *Urania*, 1844) was reprinted in Heiberg's *Prosaiske Skrifter*, IX (1861), 53-131.

is not crucial, and it is natural to deal with *The Concept of Dread* first, since its content comes before that of *Philosophical Fragments* systematically.

Even though there are various places in *The Concept of Dread* where Kierkegaard engages in direct polemic against Hegel,²³ yet it is the case that the indirect polemic is the most significant. Just as in the writings discussed in the previous section it is true of both *The Concept of Dread* and *Philosophical Fragments* that, while writing them, Kierkegaard again consulted various works of Hegel and to that extent deepened his knowledge of Hegel. But his use of these works resulted almost exclusively in criticism both against Hegel's main tendency and against individual points in his system. On the contrary, it must be noted here, as was done in the earlier Kierkegaard scholarship,²⁴ that certain writings of the German Hegelians, especially Rosenkranz and Erdmann, at least in the formal respect had had some importance for Kierkegaard. It is noteworthy in the highest degree, that in the very important introduction to *The Concept of Dread* (p. 18) Kierkegaard praises, at the expense of Hegel, Schleiermacher's immortal services to dogmatics, and [that] he develops his own structure of the sciences [*Viden-skabssystematik*] similar to that of Schleiermacher. It is thereby not only different from but incompatible with Hegel's attempt to develop the unified science of his time.

The book's whole anti-Hegelian perspective is indicated clearly enough on the reverse of the title page, where Socrates and Hamann are singled out because they undertook an important distinction which "the system's" originator and adherents did not undertake; in the dedication to Poul Martin Møller;²⁵ in the Preface, where Vigilius Haufniensis describes himself as "a layman, one who speculates, it is true, but stands nevertheless far removed from Speculation" (p. 5); in the Introduction's powerful polemic against the speculative confusion of tongues (and as a positive counterpart to

²³ I have identified individual instances in my notes on R. Løgstrup's German translation (in the volume cited in note 18 *supra*), pp. 701ff.

²⁴ For example, Bohlin in *Kierkegaards dogmatiska åskådning* [Kierkegaard's Dogmatic Viewpoint], 1925 p. 106 and *passim*, and critical opposition to Bohlin's interpretation—Lindström in *Stadiernas teologi* [Theology of the Stages] (1943), pp. 73 and 216. Henriksen in *Kierkegaards Romaner* [Kierkegaard's Novels] (1954), pp. 61ff., in the digression on anthropological definitions mentions Rosenkranz's *Psychologie* (1837) and Erdmann's *Leib und Seele* [Life and Soul] (1837) as works Kierkegaard utilized.

²⁵ On this, cf. Malantschuk's article in *Kierkegaardiana*, III (1959), 7ff.

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Kierkegaard
and
Human Values

by

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XIV,28 ff.). Then in all fairness every pastor is a witness to the truth. With a focus now on the concept of the Church, the established order cannot be regarded as a toned-down version of NT. Christianity; it is defec-tion. Differentiations within the established order are in-significant and consideration for Mynster is no longer necessary (SV XII,556). Thus SK places himself outside the established order, and he seals this by refusing on his death-bed to accept the sacrament from the hands of a pastor belonging to the Danish state Church (*Efter-ladte Papirer* 1854-55, ed. H. Gottsched, 1881, p. 597). Furthermore, SK constantly insists that it is the estab-lished order, not he, who is committing self-annihilation (e.g. SV XIV,34). For this reason he has to withdraw from the established order, which accounts for his re-tractions of the prefaces and "the moral" of *Practice in Christianity* (SV XIV,78). SK terminates the poetical re-lation to the established order and acts existentially.

Lit.: Hinrich Buß, *Kierkegaards Angriff auf die bestehende Chri-stenheit*, Hamburg 1970.

The Nineteenth Century

Søren Holm

SK did not particularly applaud the intellectual develop-ments of the first half of the 19th century with which he was familiar; he would hardly have approved more of the second half. When he speaks of the 19th century, his tone is often ironic; but he had a perfect knowledge of the humanities, while the achievements in the natural sciences were beyond his understanding. Yet he suspected that they might prove dangerous to man, who as an individual is subject to the dialectics of freedom, not of determinism, to the dialectic of responsibility, not of predictability. He therefore feared the day when it would be possible to predict what at any given time any individual person must necessarily do, the day when prophecies would be replaced by exact prognoses. But in fact such thinking was already making itself felt in the realms of spiritual life and Christianity, where Hegelian-ism had become the dominating factor: scientifically it repudiated the passionate venture of faith and took the universality of ethical rationality for granted without realizing that the ethical is based on the individual and the existential. In that century SK considered it his duty to emphasize inwardness, individuality, passion, daring naivetè, primitivity, and paradox.

The 19th century succeeded the Age of Enlightenment and rationalism, and it began with a new movement of probably unparalleled violence, romanticism which char-acterised the period between 1797 and 1830. This pe-riod was ending when SK matriculated in 1830, but he embraced romanticism with a passion. The same thing

had happened 25 years earlier to Grundtvig, but they both broke away from it, and for the same reason: in their views of life they were both definitely dualistic, whereas romanticism was monistically pantheistic. SK's aesthetic stage was biographically, if not ideologically, prior to his other stage. SK experienced romanticism; he read the romantic poets of Germany and Denmark, and was so much influenced by them that he was able to describe the aesthetic stage as one who had himself been an aesthete. He knew the brothers Schlegel, Jacobi, and Jean-Paul, von Arnim and Brentano, Tieck, Hoffmann and others, but the one who meant most to him was probably von Eichendorff, whose *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts*, (Berlin 1826) inspired SK's characterization of the aesthete. He had been through the works of all the great Danish writers, some of whom were still living e.g. Oehlenschläger, Ingemann, and Hauch; writers whom he knew personally, such as Andersen, Heiberg, and Hertz, belong to a later period.

The spirit of nature was an important subject during the romantic period; but SK spoke about the God who became man, and Grundtvig wrote about the spirit that descended on the day of Pentecost to hallow nature anew. So SK had to contend with romanticism just as he did with Hellenism; but he had a third contest also, namely, with Hegelianism, which though it developed during the romantic period, was anything but romantic itself, having a thoroughly intellectual character and no real relationship to nature. This philosophy had been adopted by most intellectuals in Denmark, above all by J. L. Heiberg and H. L. Martensen. Later, however, they moved in the direction of a theosophism inspired by Jacob Boehme and then by Schelling, whose lectures had been attended in Berlin by SK and such future eminent people as Jacob Burckhardt, Friedrich Engels, and Kro-

potkin. In Denmark SK found Hegelians and Hegel-admirers who, though lacking the greatness of their master, were daring enough to aim at "going further", at "going beyond Hegel", although SK considered them unfit to tie Hegel's shoes. On the other hand, Hegel deserved esteem because he had desired something great, though without reaching it. The Hegelian epigones in Denmark belonged to the circle of right-wing Hegelians. The left-wing Hegelians were not of much interest to SK. Evidently he did not know Marx and Engels; Strauss and Feuerbach, who wrote things that might have interested him, were of little importance to him.

But SK was certainly awake to the political developments of the 19th century in the direction of democracy and away from absolute monarchy. He disliked this development, although one might suppose him to have been attracted by the liberalistic defense of the individual. SK seems to have been aware that the sovereignty of the individual would lead to the destruction of families and generations, as in antiquity, for in the ancient big cities the individual had been swallowed up by the masses, which could not offer the same kind of security as did the families formerly. Therefore, the democracy of the 19th century was just as wrong and despicable as its nationalism. The Three Year's War, 1848-50 (between Denmark and Prussia) made no impression, national or human, on the thinker in remote Copenhagen; and the emergence of industrialism, capitalism, and imperialism that were to be so characteristic of the 19th century did not pass the threshold of his awareness. However, he was aware of the steadily growing influence of the press, which popular approval was allowed to pillory decent people and expose them to ridicule, SK himself experienced it with *The Corsair*. He was unable to understand that the talents of one journalist

were actually great enough to win the approval of the gods and made them forget their promise that laughter should always be on SK's side. SK demanded respect for the individual and order, but this was an unpalatable paradox to the 19th century, whose democratic ideas mainly concentrated on the individual. Though belonging to it, SK was no exponent of the 19th century, except insofar as he opposed its principal ideas and its leaders. Among these were Mynster and Grundtvig, the former a stubborn representative of "the established" and the latter a vociferous proclaimer of something new passed off as old. SK fought 19th century intellectualism, its want of real character, and its democracy; its nationalism left him cold.

When he discusses the 19th century, SK's tone is often ironic. Alluding especially to Hegelian philosophy, he called it a theocentric century, an epithet with a humorous sound to SK's ears, may need explanation to-day. The theocentric was a special form of the eccentric, and theocentric is speculation, theocentric is the speculator, theocentric is theory (SV VI,183), theocentric is our own age (SV IV,231) and the 19th century. Theocentric also are all good helpers and helper's helpers, who wish to help people into Christianity (SV VII,9). This is precisely what they wanted to do in the theocentric 19th century that had completely forgotten that a poor existing soul is neither eternal nor divine, nor able theocentrically to contemplate the eternal (SV VII,198). Such helpful people are not satisfied by an existence in inwardness; they want to be admitted into God's council in order to find out that divinely, theocentrically, there is no paradox whatever (SV VII,200, 202). What is demanded in this century is the right to be one's own individual self, but only by virtue of being different from the others. It was not realized that one

should be an individual in exactly the same sense as anybody else may be an individual and that this is the only way to win the ethical victory over life. Here lies perhaps the most difficult problem in the 19th century (SV VII,346).

Our age is the theocentric 19th century (SV VII,385); a theocentric, speculative, and objective age, trained in speculations only, does not wish to grapple with the ultimate and decisive difficulties of existence (SV VII,409). The theocentricity of the century, besides being detrimental to it, involves the abolition of Christianity and the creation of a new religion (SV VII,456). This is SK's own opinion, though it has been expressed with special strength by Johannes Climacus who says in the appendix to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* that as a humorist he was destined to be born in a speculative, theocentric century, in the age of speculators (Martensen) and of great men and their extraordinary discoveries (Grundtvig) (SV VII,608).

If speculation flourishes in the 19th century, faith withers. This is an epoch of few eminent believers; but then the number of fairly clever offended people is quite large, and it must be a comfort to many that what strict believers used to say in the 17th century is echoed by offended people in the 19th century (SV VI,475). In the enlightened 19th century all educated people know what the supreme good is, a thing that was unknown in Judaism as well as the 17th century. So, how fortunate is the 19th century! (SV VI,495) The 19th century is indeed a century of knowledge. All through his 6000 years of history man has loved, and poets have sung the praises of love. Hence the 19th century ought to know what love is and be able to demonstrate it (SV VII,333). Such superficialness is seen by SK to be particularly characteristic of the 19th century, whose special im-

morality comes from its only too certain awareness of the insignificance of being a single existing person; but this is why the idea of the generation – the universal – has become of central interest instead of the individual; this is fundamentally due to an aesthetic despair which has not reached the ethical stage. It is understood that being a man, no matter how excellent, is of no account, because there is no difference that really matters, and consequently a new difference has been selected: that of being born in the 19th century. So now it is one's ethical duty to try as soon as possible to determine one's little bit of existence in its relation to the generation. Far from being of real comfort, such an attempt can only constitute an even higher and more splendid kind of deception (SV VII,344 f.). It has not been understood by the 19th century that Christianity is a communication of existence completely different from speculation; but the 19th century, terribly speculative as it is, has mistaken altogether what Christianity is. When called a doctrine, Christianity was taken by the 19th century to be a philosophical system that must be comprehended (SV VII,368).

It has been totally forgotten by the 19th century what it means, strictly speaking, to exist. The pathetic was transferred to imagination and feeling, and consequently the pathos is discredited by this philosophical century, just as the dialectical becomes devoid of passion. Authentic existential pathos in its relation to eternal bliss becomes a thing of such rarity and costliness that humanly it is called folly to want to buy it. Eternal bliss is something called a sort of debenture, the value of which is no longer quoted in the speculative 19th century. Such cancelled debentures are useful only in the hands of reverend parsons as a means of fooling peasants (SV VII,374 f.); but peasants differ from philosophers by

their want of speculativeness. The great merit of the 19th century consists in its speculativeness and its deplorable transformation of existence into a thinking upon all possible things so that even an energetic existence in relation to a relative telos (aim), let alone the absolute telos, is rarely met with (SV VII,383). The 19th century has invented mediation between those contrasts which ought to be absolutely contrasted; and the great inventor is highly admired by Johannes Climacus indeed; he ought to be admired by everybody as the hero of the 19th century – provided of course that he is a student of World History and recognizes the justification of all earlier points of view and that the whole matter must necessarily end in mediation (SV VII,384). This kind of understanding, however, is made possible only by our living in the theocentricity of the 19th century that owes its theocentricity to the fact that it is able to contemplate World History with the eyes of God (SV VII,385).

The 19th century has achieved great results. It gave up the medieval idea of literal monasticism but this gave rise, on the other hand, to such worldliness that it sometimes creates difficulties, as when a troubled father asks to what school he ought to send his son, when worldliness is triumphant and the parson warns against monasticism (SV VII,391). While the monastic movement of the Middle Ages was of an outward, literal character, there is also one of a figurative, inward character originating in the impossibility of existing without God, while at the same time daily work is carried out as before. No objection can possibly be made against this, no matter what might be said in the 19th century (SV VII,404). Here God is the absolute good to whom there is no shortcut, being a clever person, neither being an Apostle's brother-in-law, nor by being born in the

19th century; for the absolute good is determined only by the way it is acquired (SV VII,418). This is why Johannes Climacus asks himself again and again whether there might not be something wrong with the theocentricity of this 19th century, with its desire to pass beyond Christianity, with its desire to speculate, with its desire for a continued development and a new religion (SV VII,456).

Even if the relation between faith and knowledge in its modern sense was of minor interest to him, SK, who considered this problem from quite another point of view, does realize the problematic conditions of christianity in the theocentric 19th century, inasmuch as the difficulties of becoming a Christian certainly had not grown less than in the beginning. On the contrary, they had to become greater, especially for cultured people, and year by year they become even greater, for the predominance of understanding in a cultured person, and his respect for objectivity, will be constantly in opposition to his becoming a Christian. In the era of culture, the opposition to Christianity will be of a nature just as dangerous as at the time of Christianity's entrance into history (SV VII,598). For this reason "the speculative-ness, the theocentricity of the 19th century" were not only the objects of Johannes Climacus's humor and irony, but also of SK's fear.

In his works SK made only a few references to the 19th century, in *Stages on Life's Way*, a little more than a dozen in the *Postscript*, but otherwise none. In his journals, however, he returns to it several years later. In 1847 he declares (Pap.VIII,1 A 414) that the fundamental confusion of the modern age, traceable in its logic, its metaphysics, its dogmatics, and its whole way of life, is due to man's removal of the fathomless chasm of quality that expresses the relation between God and man;

owing to this removal, contemporary dogmatics is capable of such blasphemous profundities as were unknown to paganism. The modern age is marked not so much by doubt, as by insubordination. The falsification formerly unknown, that is going on now concerning the relationship between God and man and the doctrine of the God-man, gave SK the position in this century of a lowly constable whose necessary task is to confiscate all illusions and false ideas about the relationship to God. That task ought to have been Mynster's, but he cared only for power, not for truth. In the same year SK writes that the theocentric 19th century has been dishonest ever since the abandonment of "Kant's honest way", the famous 100 dollars were paid for the acquisition of theocentricity. The present age is dishonest, lacks naivetè. The quality of being human as the Greeks were has been forgotten, for no Sophist, however grandiloquent, was ever theocentric. The distinction between art and science has been forgotten; for everything has become science; art is conceived only aesthetically as fine art, and the ethical, assuming that everybody is aware of it, is indifferently related to knowledge. Modern science has neglected ethics, and an existing ethicist is a phenomenon utterly unknown. The characteristics of the modern age are dishonesty, self-deception, and dilemma. Itself lacking naivetè, it takes lack of naivetè to be the same as maturity. The present age also lacks primitivity, literarily and socially (Pap.VIII,2 B 81).

These thoughts are reconsidered in Pap.VIII,2 B 86, where "Kant's honest way" is referred to again, and the age is called dishonest, or perhaps rather bewildered, for deliberate deception and real hypocrisy have become rare; a real hypocrite is indeed a person of character. But the present age is not altogether guiltless of its self-deception, and so SK does not hesitate to apply the

word dishonesty to the age – “the saddest and most monstrous, yet apparently so excusable, even brilliant, dishonesty” (Pap.VII,2 B 86, p. 169). The basic fault of this age is abolition of the category of individuality in favor of the generation. Hegel’s huge endeavor to master the presuppositions was influenced by the very idea of presuppositions; it was a quantitative destruction, instead of a qualitative one; but the only remedy for the bewilderment of thought by selfreflection is ethics, and Hegel did not understand ethics. Primitivity, the other contemporary lack, is mentioned by SK in this connection. The thinker who sacrifices his primitivity in order to be readily understood by his contemporaries will acquire influence and gain admittance to the parade of the generation which is on the point of leaving. Hegel was the discoverer of the historicizing method by which all primitivity was abolished. As the individual is caught in the whirl of impatience to be understood, the generation is extremely eager to understand the individual. This involves dishonesty, and prattlepeddlers were never given better conditions; the 19th century is “the golden age of prattle-peddlers” (Pap.VIII,2 B 86, p. 172).

A whole page was written by SK in 1854 (Pap.XI,2 A 186) about “the enlightened 19th century” which does not have more atheists than hitherto, because the courage to declare oneself an atheist is lacking. Irrespective of their own convictions, parents have their children baptized, and people make fools of themselves by representing as their religion what they consider a fable. This is infinitely more miserable and wretched and abominable than the quiet acceptance of one’s being a cuckold. This is what the enlightened 19th century is like, a century that probably owes its name to its new gas-lighting. All is superficial, as is the age in which an author does not become an author through his own prim-

itivity but the previous study of others. Everything is doubted, except the extent to which any of us is actually a human being (Pap.X,1 A 666).

SK’s characterization and criticism of the 19th century are in many respects parallel to his battle against official Christianity. In both instances, superficiality was the most conspicuous feature. This was the century when, like Socrates confronting the Athenians, SK, with respect first to the people of Copenhagen and later to the whole world, was given the task of telling what it means to be a human being before God. The more we consider things from God’s point of view – as if, in the words of Holberg, we were his colleagues and assessors (judges) – the more distant we are from Him. In SK’s opinion, no century ever stood farther removed from N.T. Christianity.

Lit.: Spiritual life in Denmark has been described by Vilh. Andersen in his *Illustreret Dansk Litteraturhistorie* [Illustrated History of Danish Literature], vol. III, 1924; philosophy by H. Hoffding in his *Danske Filosofer* [Danish Philosophers], 1909, and by Søren Holm, *Filosofien i Norden før 1900* [Philosophy in Scandinavia Before 1900], 1967. Philosophy outside Denmark has been dealt with by the latter in *Filosofien i det nittende Aarhundrede* [Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century], 1967.

stresses that dream-life is a flowering and, as such, the necessary condition for the spirit to bear fruit (SV X, 131 f.).

This definition of dream thus explains how SK can designate the first of the stages of immediacy as "dreaming" (SV I,72). In *Either/Or* the stage is symbolized by the page in Mozart's *Murrriage of Figaro*. This analysis has its preparations especially in some journal entries about "the stage at which the child had not separated itself from its surroundings ("me") (Pap.I, C 125 and 126), but it also points forward toward the beginning of *The Concept of Anxiety*, where innocence is analysed and characterized precisely in that "spirit is dreaming in a person": "The spirit, dreaming, projects its own reality; but this reality is nothing; but this nothing constantly sees innocence outside of itself". Thus SK's conception of dreams leads forward to his concept of anxiety and thus constitutes the point of departure for the whole of his psychology, because "anxiety is a determination of the dreaming spirit, and as such belongs to psychology" (SV IV,345 f.).

Lit.: Kern, Hans, *Die Seelenkunde der Romantik, Das deutsche Leben*, 2nd series, vol. 3, Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1937; Kluchhohn, Paul, *Das Ideengut der deutschen Romantik*, 5th printing, Tübingen, 1966; Nordentoft, Kresten, *Kierkegaard's Psychology*, trans. by B. H. Kirmmse. Atl. Highlands, N. J., 1978.

Erotic Love

K. Nordentoft

I. Falling in Love (*Forelskelse*)

Falling in love as a literary motif, as occasion for psychological conflicts, and as an object of reflection is to be found throughout SK's esthetic and pseudonymous authorship. But the most concise and definitive determination of falling in love is to be found in *Works of Love*. Falling in love, being a passion, takes complete possession of an individual, engages him/her, and precludes the individual from relating to him/herself and the beloved with disinterested indifference. As far as this goes, falling in love can be "an image of faith" —but no more than an image, for faith's "Thou shalt love" gives passion a fundamentally different form than that which it has in falling in love. It is "as if love thereby lost all, and yet it wins all" (SV IX,38–40). Christian love relativizes the passionate absoluteness of falling in love. It does not (necessarily) negate falling in love, but seeks to make room for love of one's neighbor "above even the first and highest moment of falling in love" (SV IX,163). For the fact is that falling in love is at its deepest level self-love, self-potential, "the very height of self-feeling", because the lover is here "intoxicated in the other-I" which is "the first I once again". The merging of the first (loving) and second (beloved) I to "one self, one I" is a result of a "self-love which selfishly can unite the two into a new selfish self". Love of one's neighbor, on the other hand, does not make the lover "one with the neighbor in a united self" because "one's neighbor is the first-Thou" (SV IX,

70-72). Love presupposes "a you and an I", but it excludes a "mine and yours (these possessive pronouns)". In falling in love, on the other hand, where the difference between "you and I" is annulled, the difference between "mine and yours", however, has only seemingly disappeared. In reality it is simply transformed to an "ours", which "for the fellowship is exactly the same as "mine" is for the individual". The exclusivity, then, is the same—an "augmented and refined self-love". But because "mine and yours" is not radically defeated here it remains latently present—"it still slumbers within as a possibility" in falling in love's union of "you and I". Falling in love is fundamentally a trade relationship, and the exchange of rings is an "absolutely fitting symbol of erotic love". But although the trade relationship seems to annul the individuality, it does not annul individual ownership "because that for which I exchange myself becomes mine again" (SV IX,302 f.). Falling in love demands reciprocated love, "just as in the commercial world". "One makes a transaction of love; one pays out his love in exchange," and if it does not yield returns, one is cheated. This deception is a reflection of the self-deception of falling in love—"that one is able to love only one person", and that this one person is presupposed to yield returns: "one who has fallen in love is a self-lover" (SV IX,270). This unconscious distinction which falling in love maintains between "mine and yours" ("for one who has fallen in love seeks in a certain, often unconscious sense his/her own, and thus also has a mine") is not annulled by abolishing "yours" but is annulled when "the love of self-renunciation" annuls "mine" and makes everything "yours". This "sacrificing love", however, cannot by itself make the whole world "yours", for this "yours", too, contains "a relationship of polarity, and there is no polarity in the

whole". The radical annulment of the difference between "mine and yours" occurs only when "all becomes His, belongs to Him who had no mine at all, who in self-renunciation made all of His yours" (SV IX,304 f.).

II. Erotic Love (*Elskov*)

An understanding of SK's concept of *Elskov* (Erotic love) must take "det Erotiske" (the erotic) as its point of departure. "The erotic" is admittedly a more comprehensive concept, yet it also affords a frame of reference for the concept erotic love, for the two terms are often used synonymously or nearly synonymously. (Cf. "that the erotic has its potency in the relationship between the feminine and the masculine", SV VI,46; see for ex. SV VI,46; see for ex. SV I,52 f., 404, 448; IV,375; VI,110, 238 f.; VII,80 f.).

In "the Immediate Stages of the Erotic or the Musical Erotic" in *Either/Or I*, the erotic is desire. SK's pseudonym finds the definitive sexual culmination of desire symbolized in Mozart's Don Juan figure. The depiction of desire's erotic (but pre-sexual) form which emerges from the analyses of the Page in *The Marriage of Figaro* and Papageno in *The Magic Flute*, however, give a broader perspective, the consequences of which can only be suggested here. Desire is seen here as a basic anthropological phenomenon which under given historical circumstances *can* manifest itself in intensified sexuality as in the case of Don Juan. Its fundamental significance, however, is something else. Desire is primarily completely undefined. It has no direction or object, but is a "dreaming" about or a "discovering" of the sorts of definite shapes it *can* assume and the sorts of specific objects upon which it *can* fix itself. With childhood in mind SK describes this as yet "undefined awakening

desire in unconscious conflict with the surroundings" as an "endless approach towards conscious desire", i.e. towards the fixing of desire (Pap.I, C 125, draft to the essay). In this initial condition desire has no subject and the desirer has no identity *because* desire has no object. Desire is latent and knowable only as an unclarified, present, passive, unconscious longing (SV I,66 ff.). When its object comes into being it is not as a sexual object, but as an object in the most elementary sense, as the subject-constituting other to which the desirer can relate, and through this relation come into being as a self-identity. That is to say when desire isolates its object, desire's subject is simultaneously set apart: "(...) this shaking separates desire and its object, gives desire an object. This is a dialectical determination which must be sharply maintained—only when the object exists does the desire exist, only when the desire exists does the object exist". Therefore "the importance of their coming into being is not that they are united, but to the contrary, that they are separated" (SV I,71). Thus understood, erotic desire's real achievement, then, is to constitute its own subject by positing its object *as* different from the subject. These are the rudiments of a fruitful subject-object line of thought in SK which is seldom noticed. Its perspectives can only be suggested here with key phrases: "I posit the absolute which posits me" (SV II,230); the self is "posited by another" (SV XI,144), by "that (...) in the face of which it is a self" (SV XI,216; cf. SV V,207 ff., SV IX,344 f. and Pap. VII,1 A 10).

Existence "is precisely separation" of subject and object (SV VII,111). In this subject-constituting separation, anxiety is decisive for which "final" shape desire's endless giddiness takes in the transgression of the prohibition (cf. *The Concept of Anxiety*, SV IV,345 ff., 366), i.e. anxiety has a decisive impact upon which

specific objects desire fixes upon, and thus is decisive for which particular subject is constituted. Don Juan's anxiety-determined choice of object (1003 sexual objects) with its implicit choice of subject is but one specific shape the erotic may take. That the suggested comprehensive meaning of "the erotic" is on the whole closely linked to the narrower colloquial meaning which has to do with the concept of anxiety, for in the culmination of the separation crisis in which the actual constituting of the subject takes place ("the Fall") sexuality is posited as a problem (SV IV,353 f., 357 ff.).

This is not to say, however, that the erotic as erotic love is in every case unavoidably fixed upon sexuality in the narrower sense of the word. The form which erotic love takes is historically variable and depends upon the historical epoch's management of anxiety. Even if the pre-Christian Greek paganism "lies in anxiety" (SV IV, 403), it is "an anxiety which the Greek likely did not notice, although his plastic beauty trembled in it" (SV IV, 370). Anxiety here is unclarified, not manifest, and therefore not disjunctive and discriminating. Thus the "enormous contradiction" between spirit and sexuality does not become clear in Hellenism. Hellenism does not perceive the contradiction as antagonistic, but interprets it "in beauty" as "the unity of the psychical and the corporal" (SV IV, 375; Socrates' special understanding is disregarded here). In agreement with this the esthete is able to assert in his sketch of "the different forms taken by the erotic at different stages in the development of worldconsciousness" that in Hellenism in general erotic love was "present everywhere as a moment, and as such momentarily present in the beautiful individuality". Erotic love was present "everywhere", i.e. it was not fixed upon particular individuals or particular activities or bodily organs (cf. the Page). Therefore it

was not crystallized into definite conceptions either: "The gods no less than humans knew its power (...) in none of them, however, was erotic love present as a principle; in so far as it was in them, in the individual person, it was there as a moment of the universal power of erotic love which was, however, not present anywhere, and therefore did not even exist for Greek thought, nor for the Greek consciousness" (SV I,52). But just as the Greek erotic love was not fixed upon sexuality (fixed upon the genital function, to use Norman O. Brown's expression), neither was it fixed upon sexual differentiation--in contrast to the middle ages' chivalrous love in which "the idea of the feminine" was in movement. This is not the case "in Hellenism where everyone was simply a beautiful individuality, but there was no notion of the feminine" (SV I,81). SK is not thinking primarily of homosexuality here, as is confirmed not only by remarks in *The Concept of Irony* (especially SV XIII,148), but also by the fact that in *Either/Or* he reports that the Greeks fell in love with girls, and that according to legend the god Hercules could finish off "up to fifty girls" in one night! (SV I, 86 f.). This does not of itself contradict the central characteristic of the pre-Christian, Greek form of erotic love, however, because the point is that precisely because it is unbound by fixed forms erotic love may take a variety of forms. That it is not bound to sensuality in the sense of genital function does not imply that sensuality is excluded. To the contrary: "To say that sensuality existed in the world prior to Christianity would, of course, be an exceedingly stupid objection against me, for it goes without saying that that which is to be excluded always exists before that which excludes it, even if in another sense it first emerges in being excluded" (SV I,51).

The decisively new aspect which arises in and with Christianity is that sensuality is excluded and that only thus does it "in another sense come into being". In *The Concept of Anxiety's* subtly shaded formulation: "After Christianity has come into the world and redemption is posited, a light of contradiction is cast over sensuousness, a light which was not seen in paganism and which serves precisely to strengthen the proposition that sensuality is sinfulness" (SV IV,380). For SK sensuality and sexuality are not sinfulness, but the fact that Christianity "serves to strengthen" such an impression has a series of psychological consequences. (See Kresten Nordentoft: *Kierkegaards psykologi*, Copenhagen 1972, pp. 87-106). Among other things this altered attitude towards sensuality means that erotic love's form is changed. SK takes this point to its extreme in the Mozart essay where the difference between Christianity and Hellenism is illustrated with the help of Don Juan, who is precisely a product of Christianity, more precisely of the late Middle Ages (SV I,81). By considering sensuality directly "under the category of spirit", i.e. as that which is to be excluded, Christianity has indirectly, and contrary to intention, made it powerful. "As principle, as power, as system in itself, sensuality is first posited by Christianity" (SV I,50 f.). With this erotic love is fixed upon the genital function and detached from the corporalpsychical, beautiful whole which it encompassed in Hellenism. All non-sexual aspects are shorn away in Don Juan. "His erotic love is not psychical but sensuous", but this means also that erotic love is fixed upon the non-conscious: it does not differentiate and has no doubt, disquiet or inhibitions, but is "absolutely faithless, it does not love one, but all". Therefore it is non-individualized, and lacks both discrimination and language (SV I,87 f.).

SK, however, is not describing in this the actual form of erotic love in modern society. Don Juan is not to be understood as an individual, but as the incarnation of that element in individuals in Christian culture which "the spirit" (in the opera: the condemnatory commandant) excludes, and which therefore lives its own, uncontrolled life. The lover types which appear in SK's fictive writings are not Don Juan types either. This applies to "Johannes the Seducer" in *Either/Or*, "the youth" in *Repetition*, participants in the symposium "In Vino Veritas", and Quidam in "Guilty-Not Guilty" (in *Stages*). Although they differ widely in their reactions to erotic love, they share an individualistic attitude of reflection towards it, an attitude which is distinctly "psychical" in contrast to Don Juan's. In these contexts the sensual-psychical erotic love appears in problematic form, and in a way SK's fictive lover figures furnish the best illustration of his thesis that "not even erotic love's immediacy in the present time is as carefree as the lily of the field, and in the lovers' eyes more beautiful than Solomon's splendour. An erotic criticism and a despondent sensibleness overcomes freedom from care and falsifies the worth (...)" (SV VIII,82). According to the cited passage it is "temporal" considerations of prudence (financial worries, etc.) which through reflection inhibit modern erotic love's passion, but the figures in SK's own novels demonstrate a purer strain of "infinite" reflection's inhibition. This form of reflection's inhibition is expressed as an intellectual self-enjoyment with erotic love as incitement (Johannes the Seducer), as goal-inhibited distraction and sublimation ("the youth"), or as a critically situated, guilt-accentuated introversion (Quidam: "It may well happen that a lover cannot sleep for the disquiet of erotic love, I perhaps remain sleepless because I cannot find out whether I love or not", SV VI,

245). Common for these fictive lovers is that they basically "find it difficult to comprehend something so intermediary" as erotic love, and that they therefore "do not suffer purely erotically" (SV VI,239), and yet they simultaneously *relate to erotic love* as the occasion for their reflections and as the object of their attention. Precisely the *relationship* to indicates in addition the distance *from* erotic love.

The conception of erotic love to which these pseudonyms relate, and by which they are to a great extent determined, seems to be that which is referred to in the Mozart essay in *Either/Or* as the chivalrous love which had its origin in the early Middle Ages. Like the Greek erotic love, chivalrous love too is psychical, and thus not only fixed on sexuality like Don Juan's is. But in contrast to the Greek erotic love and similar to Don Juan's, it is touched by Christianity, which is why erotic love is now fixed upon sexual differentiation, that is (from the essay's masculine point of view) upon "the idea of the feminine" (SV I,81). In this it resembles Don Juan's, while the difference here is between Don Juan's essentially faithless, i.e. undifferentiated erotic love, and chivalrous love's essentially faithful, i.e. selective, individualizing fixing upon one object of love (SV I,87).

This is the concept of erotic love with which SK concerns himself in the authorship—with both acceptance and criticism. Erotic love, being psychical and faithful (fixed upon one object) is passionate, ideal, uncompromising, absolute, enthusiastic, inward, and subjective as well. Therefore it is described in *The Postscript* and elsewhere as an analogy to the passion of faith. (See for ex. SV VII,44, 61 note, 117, 187, 214, 333, 499; and although with important reservations VII, 375, 445 note, 499 and especially 600 and 605 note.) Judge William defends this erotic love in its ideality against re-

lations which are more commonsense, prudent, compromising and akin to marriages of convenience (SV II, 31, 50 and elsewhere). He asserts throughout that erotic love is not compromised but cultivated and ennobled by being assimilated into the ethical sphere of marriage. The very fact that he must *defend* erotic love and *argue* for its validity, however, is in itself an indication of the problematic nature of his harmonizing line of thought, and this complex of problems is then unfolded in other contexts. Frater Taciturnus sees in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* the perfect expression for the chivalrous, romantic-passionate erotic love, but adds that this play, with the pathos of its unreserved naiveté, can cause the modern theater-goer an almost embarrassing experience (SV VI,429). "As is true of all passion, so it is true of erotic love that one who receives its initiation in the initiated moment of falling in love stands *free*, free on the foolhardy heights of illusion, free and unendingly taking in the whole world (...) If everything is to be so exceedingly good, this protected moment must be granted, this moment in which the whole of existence magically obeys one implicitly, in which nothing, nothing diminishes the boundless abandon of erotic love which occurs in utmost privacy, and is something other than all the loving caresses because it is the presupposition, that which hastens the lovers along, the anticipation of eternity out of which the many or the few years which unite the lovers are to be lived" (SV VIII,55). SK, however, finds that in his day this ideality has become so problematic that it is impossible to ground a way of life upon it. His pseudonyms' sentimental (in a Schillerian sense) and reflection-inhibited, perhaps sexually anxious circling around the concept of erotic love are just so many demonstrations of its unreality, but also of it as an ideal which obligates and binds. Chivalrous-romantic

erotic love, then, appears as a positive concept by virtue of its ideality, but in addition as a sharply contested concept due to the reflectiveness of "the times" and of SK himself.

It is in fact first in *Works of Love* that SK definitively frees himself from the conception of erotic love in its chivalrous-romantic, passionate-individualistic, idealized form. Here there is no longer discussion of pseudonymous heroes and their anguished fascination for, and confused restraint regarding this group of conceptions, but rather of a clear-headed analysis of erotic love made possible because SK only at this point truly works out his alternative concept—love of one's neighbor. What more traditionally was described as erotic love's faithfulness is now analytically understood as its exclusiveness. This exclusiveness is the key to understanding the essence of erotic love in contrast to Christian love of one's neighbor. Erotic love is essentially partiality; this very expression implies the exclusion of the non-loved (love to someone at the expense of others): "The most passionate boundlessness of preference in excluding others is to love only the one and only; self-renunciation's boundlessness in giving itself is not to exclude a single one" (SV IX,66 cf. 63). Erotic love is therefore fixed upon one single object who "is loved in distinction from the rest of the world" (SV IX,30). Therefore it also depends upon the particular characteristics of the object, and the object's perfection becomes a condition for erotic love's perfection (SV IX,80 f., 181 f. and elsewhere). This results in a tendency to idealize (de-realize) the beloved (SV IX,29, 72) who is transformed into phantasms and dreams (SV IX,185 ff.). This idealization, though, is equivocal and contains a hidden betrayal of the other person's reality because it implies a latent lack of confidence in the ideal. This lack of confidence be-

comes manifest when the beloved does not live up to expectations and erotic love consequently turns to jealousy, suspiciousness, hate or indifference. In both the idealization and the jealousy erotic love is exposed as selfishness—in happy erotic love as self-potential, self-admiration, self-projection and *egotisme à deux* (SV IX,68–71), and in unhappy erotic love as frustrated self-pity (SV IX,46 ff., 68, 82, and elsewhere).

By contrasting "the self-love of erotic love" (SV IX, 16) with love of one's neighbor SK manages to unite these contradictory terms on a basis other than that of Judge William's more harmonizing attempt to mediate. Precisely as being essentially different and incommensurable erotic love and love of one's neighbor can be united (SV IX,76 ff.), for love of one's neighbor excludes nothing—neither, then, does it exclude the one who is beloved in the erotic sense. The conflict between them arises where erotic love as an absolute passion wants to assert itself absolutely, because by doing so it excludes love (SV IX,64). To do so is its innate tendency, and SK rejects it in so far as this is the case, while he accepts it and the instinctual foundation upon which it rests as relatively legitimate (SV IX,66 f.).

That erotic love and love of one's neighbor are contradictory terms means that they are essentially different forms and expressions of one and the same human "need"—the divinely created need to love (SV IX,19 f., 50–52, 82 f., 177 ff.). Therefore the line of thought in *Works of Love* does not seem to exclude the idea which SK puts forth in other connections—namely that "sincere erotic love, too, is an upbringing toward goodness" (SV VIII,164). In all probability a cryptic passage in *Philosophical Fragments* may be best understood against this background. These passages deal with "the paradox of erotic love" in which self-love culminates in

"love to another" in that self-love in this passion's self-transcendence "wills its own downfall". Here "self-love is laid waste, nevertheless it is not annihilated but is taken captive, and is erotic love's *spolia opima* [spoils of war], but it may again come to life, and this becomes erotic love's temptation". The meaning seems to be that the self-love which is thus imprisoned can rise again as true self-love, which is the opposite of erotic love and the precondition for love of one's neighbor when it is understood in the context of the law of love, for "the religion of love" needs only "to presuppose one condition, and takes it for granted: to love oneself, in order to bid one to love one's neighbor as oneself" (SV IV,232 and 241)—a line of thought which is considered thoroughly in *Works of Love* (SV IX,27 ff.). Thus understood erotic love is—by way of suggestion—not only the contradictory opposite of love of one's neighbor, but becomes its precondition as well, in that it annuls itself, or is annulled by love's "Thou shalt love".

Engagement (Forlovelse)

K. Nordentoft

Author Villy Sørensen, directly inspired by SK's psychology launched "the situation of engagement" as a literary-psychological concept in his essay "Folkeviser og forlovelser" [Folksongs and Engagements] ... The situation of engagement here is the special, critical, anxiety-filled situation of transition in which a person wishes to give him/herself to another, and yet dreads losing him/herself in the process. The individual comes into internal contradiction over a conflict of interpretation which arises in the meeting of the past to which one is accustomed and the unknown future implied in the engagement. Not only SK's concept of anxiety, but also his use of engagement as a literary motif has inspired Villy Sørensen here. In Quidam's diary in *Stages on Life's Way* the decisive factor is precisely the conflict of interpretation in the meeting with the girl and anticipated unknown consequence. "My view of life has become equivocal for me—exactly how I am as yet unable to say" (SV VI,229). His self-centered, "demonic" (SV VI,419) love-hatred for the girl is inextricably connected to his ambivalent self-understanding—a self-understanding which wavers between proud self-admiration and guilt feelings, between longing to give himself and dread of letting go of himself and his "idea". SK is able to use precisely the situation of engagement as a prototype of the possibility-filled crisis of uncertainty because from the very moment the engagement is entered into, the situation is a breach: a

latent breach with the girl which is later manifested in the annulment of the engagement, and a breach in his own self-understanding: "And are there not as it were two natures striving within me? That is: have I become ten years older or ten years younger?" (SV VI,228). On the basis of this conflict his religious reflections unfold, and as far as this goes the engagement story serves as the take-off point for the problem-complex which follows in Frater Taciturnus' postscript: "Essentially I employ it for orientation in the religious sphere" (SV VI,420). "The engagement was a prelude, and the piece began when it was broken off" (SV VI,267). SK is occupied less with the engagement itself than with the breach which it can illustrate, and the dialectic which arises in a situation of separation (SV VII,251 f.). In *Repetition* the engagement crisis itself is little more than an occasion for "the youth's" religious crisis of self-understanding. In "The Diary of the Seducer" in *Either/Or* the seducer exploits a refined engagement as a double-deceit, and the breach of the engagement as a means of seducing Cordelia. Then after the breach her real, conscious engagement crisis sets in as an open, ambivalent conflict (SV I,323 ff.). SK expanded upon this motif (the psychic consequences of a breach of engagement when the ambivalent stream of emotions can no longer be directed outwards towards a loved-hated second person, but strike inward and are transformed into self-reproaching, objectless melancholy) in *Either/Or* in the essays "The Reflection of Classical Tragedy in the Modern Tragedy" and "Shadowgraphs".

Lit.: Henriksen, Aage: *Kierkegaards romaner* [Kierkegaard's Novels], Copenhagen 1954 (Second printing 1969). Sørensen, Villy: "Folkeviser og forlovelser", *Digtere og dæmoner* [Poets and Demons], Copenhagen 1959, pp. 134-74. Nordentoft, Kresten: *Kierkegaards psykologi*, Copenhagen 1972, pp. 65-71 and 331-52. *Kierkegaard's Psychology*, trans. by Bruce H. Kimmse. Atlantic Highlands, N. J., 1978.

The Art of Breaking Off

Palle Hoff

In his account of the aesthetic stage in *Either/Or* and in *Stages on Life's Way*, SK sometimes mentions the art of breaking off. In "The Rotation Method" in *Either/Or*, the aesthete A. says: "When two beings fall in love with one another, and begin to suspect that they were meant for each other, it is time to have the courage to break it off; for by going on they have everything to lose and nothing to gain." (SV I,311) In "Equilibrium Between the Aesthetic and Ethical in the Composition of the Personality" in *Either/Or*, II, Judge William says about A.: "If you are to think out an idea, to read through a book, to carry out a plan, if you are about to experience a little romance, – yes, even if you are to buy yourself a new hat, then you set about it with great vigour ... But when the month is up, or the half year which you always regard as the maximum, you break off, saying: That's the end of it; you retire and leave the other party to finish the work, or if you have worked at it alone you say nothing about it to anybody." (SV II,212–13) Reflections on the subject occur in the description of the breaking up of the banquet in "In Vino Veritas". When the participants have taken leave of each other by emptying their full glasses which they afterwards break against the door, the narrator comments: "The pleasure of breaking off thus had its due, this imperial pleasure which, though briefer than any other, is yet emancipating as no other is. With a libation every enjoyment ought to begin ... One breaks off, and it requires strength to do so, greater strength than to cut a knot,

because the difficulty of the knot engenders passion, whereas the passion it takes to break off one must muster up oneself. In a certain outward sense the result is the same, but viewed artistically there is a world of difference, whether something ceases to exist, simply comes to an end, or is broken off by an act of freedom, whether it is an accident or a passionate decision, whether it is all over like the ballad of the schoolmaster when there is no more of it or it is brought to an end by the imperial sword-stroke of pleasure, whether it is a triviality everybody has experienced or that mystery which escapes the majority." (SV VI,92) In "Observations about Marriage, in Reply to Objections" and in "Guilty?"/"Not Guilty?" SK employs the word break off both as a verb and as a noun, and it is used primarily about breaking off a love affair, an engagement, or a marriage.

In Pap. there is ample evidence that SK was personally preoccupied with the problem of breaking off, i.e. of terminating his literary activities. In a note from May 1849 SK desists from doing so on grounds of principle: "To attain the object of one's highest ambitions, and then break off irrevocably ... The mere thought of doing so (even if I could carry it into effect) is in no respect a religious thought ..." (Pap. X,1 A 413) A note from June 1849 says, among other things: "Now it is impossible. Now my very self is against it: to be a writer for a couple of years only, then to apply for a post, to master the art of breaking off. This is impossible now; the more so, since it was my firm decision last year, when I had sold my house at a small profit, to break off and go abroad. (I did not even rent lodgings at that time – not until a long time afterwards). And I have always considered the Friday Discourses a suitable place to end." (Pap.X,1 A 424) (The Friday Discourses are

"Discourses at the Communion on Fridays.") In a long entry dated Oct., 13, 1853, SK reflects on the early phase of his literary career: "With every new work I kept telling myself, Now it is time to break off. My impulse to do so was particularly strong when I had finished the "Concluding Postscript". Then I made up my mind to stop – then I wrote the line about the Corsair." (Pap.X,5 A 146, p. 152)

Deceit, Deception

G. E. Arbaugh

The concept of deception appears throughout SK's works. Like Nietzsche SK senses a fraudulent character in much of modern life, prominent in the lives of the cultured and educated but also present in common men. Unlike Nietzsche his quarrel is not so much with the religion and morality men profess, as with the way in which men ignore these and accommodate them to worldly standards. A fundamental objective of his work is to expose these existential deceptions and assist men out of them – in part at least by deceptions of his own.

SK's interest in "deception" has various roots in his life and times – in such matters as his psychological closeness and relation to his fiancée, his admiration for Socrates, and the literary traditions of the time. Confronting a civilized, educated, and professedly Christian culture, it is not surprising that he should seek the source of its spiritual sickness not in ignorance but in willed deception. Most important, this emphasis in SK is a corollary of his view of human nature. Man is an unstable union of temporal and eternal, intended to be fused together in proper harmony under the aegis of the eternal, ultimately with the help of God. The task of fashioning an authentic self is, however, arduous; men are devious, willing to deceive themselves and be deceived; and God, although ready to guide men into truth will not violate their freedom and thereby preclude a spiritual achievement. Much of life can therefore be understood as an unhappy attempt to escape the rigors of genuine existence – a theme elaborated for

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Irony and Existence: The Nihilistic Possibility

"... there can be no schoolmaster ... in the art of existing. ... In relation to existing there is for all existing persons one schoolmaster—existence itself."—S. K., *Journals*

In one of the many *obiter dicta* in his journals Kierkegaard once remarked that he began with 'the Socratic'. This comment may seem to be quite clear, not needing further elaboration. It is, however, like so many of his asides, somewhat ambiguous. Did he mean that he began with a Socratic approach to human existence, with the subjectivity that he later stresses so much? Did he mean that he began with Socratic inquiry? Or did he mean, perhaps, that he began with a skepticism reminiscent of that of Socrates? One could find evidence in Kierkegaard's writings to support a positive answer to each of these questions—unless that is, we did not have *The Concept of Irony*. For, what he means by 'the Socratic' is unveiled in this remarkable phenomenological analysis of the being of a man who represented for Kierkegaard the paradigmatic individual. It is Socrates who represents the individual who shows the intimate relationship between thought and life—the dialectical, existential thinker par excellence. Basically, what Kierkegaard called 'the Socratic' referred to a polemical attitude towards conventional 'knowledge' or opinion, the undermining of confidence in "objective" certainties and the correlative search for self-knowledge as well as a subjective basis for ethical self-being. From the point of view of objective knowledge, or the pretension of reason to comprehend the totality of reality, the Socratic standpoint is described by Kierkegaard as nihilistic. In this regard, he was in agreement with Nietzsche's judgment of Socrates, even though his understanding of the

meaning of Socrates' existence was far more profound than that of Nietzsche. *The Concept of Irony* is a phenomenological (in the Hegelian sense of the term) analysis and interpretation of the being of Socrates. That a work with such deep personal meaning for Kierkegaard should be presented in the form of something so pedestrian as a master's thesis is merely testimony to Kierkegaard's remarkable sense of irony.

The being of Socrates fascinated Kierkegaard from his early work on *The Concept of Irony* to some of the last entries in his journals. Kierkegaard's understanding of the Socratic 'standpoint' must be seen in the light of his own personal attempt to come to grips with his polemical tendencies, with a skepticism that brought him to the brink of a nihilism—a theoretical nihilism—that he never could accept. Although, with his usual irony, he retained the Hegelian language in his *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard already repudiated what he called the "new wisdom," denying that "the Idea's own movements" should ever come to expression in himself.¹ He was, in fact, more offended by Danish Hegelians than by Hegel himself.² However, he had turned away from the hypnotic attraction of a speculative dialectic that resolves all oppositions in an ultimate, rational reconciliation, a dialectic that could appropriate Socratic subjectivism as well as the paradox of Christianity.

It was Socrates' irony that could be forged into an instrument to be used in an attack upon the pretensions of a speculative philosophy that could "abrogate" everything and convert every personal or intellectual phenomenon into a *moment* in a progressive, immanent teleology. The significance of Socrates' subjective "turn" was annulled by Hegel and was relegated to a mere "negative moment." Of course, some of the elements of Kierkegaard's existentialism are either implicitly or explicitly present in Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (this is especially the case in regard to Kierkegaard's concept of 'spirit' in relation to concrete ethical actuality). But this does not mean that Kierkegaard did not use some of Hegel's philosophical terminology and some of his basic concepts in an original and creative way. In addition, it is false to suggest, as Walter Kaufmann does in his recent book on Hegel, that Kierkegaard was merely parasitic on

Hegelian 'wisdom'.³ For Kierkegaard suggests that if Hegel had fully understood the meaning of Socratic subjectivity, or the dialectic of life, it would have been a stumbling block in the development of his universal, rationalistic system, a tempting foolishness that would have to be mysteriously annulled and preserved (*aufgeheben*). To make the existing individual the starting point of reflection, to concern oneself exclusively with the contingent dialectic of individual life, to hold that the existing authentic individual is the only reality we can truly know, would have been a scandal to Hegel. If the individual's purely contingent being were to have meaning, the cunning of reason (*der List der Vernunft*) would see to it that the individual would have unconsciously served a higher goal, a higher purpose, a supraindividual rational *telos*! Hegel was able to abrogate the Socratic ironic standpoint precisely because he did not fully appreciate what it meant. Certainly, Kierkegaard refused to allow the ironic or nihilistic standpoint to be "absorbed" into a holistic system that sees in irony only what is negativistic and discounts its significance for the personal and intellectual development of the individual thinker. Since Kierkegaard himself (as his journals indicate) lived through the nihilistic standpoint that he attributes to Socrates, and since he believed that it marked a turning point in his own philosophical and personal development, he is unwilling to have it treated casually as a mere negative phase or moment (*Momente*) in the process of the dialectic of spirit.

Obviously, Kierkegaard believed that the ironic standpoint of Socrates (in its purely negative form) must be transcended. But it must also be analyzed, described, and understood in order to see why it must be overcome and how it can be overcome. One does not overcome what I shall call the 'nihilism of reflection' by the accumulation of new knowledge, by the formulation of yet another possible interpretation of the nature of "reality" or "the world," by a new theory of the place of man in the *kosmos*. Any "new" metaphysics that claims to have discovered the ultimate, objective nature of reality will turn out to be yet another theoretical *possibility*, a possibility that negates the truth-claim of other metaphysical possibilities and that, perhaps, contains

within itself the seeds of its own negation. The ironic standpoint can only be overcome by resolute choice, by decisiveness. This is an urgent matter for Kierkegaard since the overcoming of the "infinite negativity" of the ironic standpoint meant for him the "overcoming of nihilism" (*überwindung des Nihilismus*). It was Kierkegaard (and not Nietzsche) who first discerned the problem of nihilism as the underlying 'presence' in the world of his own time.⁴ The nihilism he discusses in *The Concept of Irony* is the projected analysis of what was for him not only a theoretical standpoint but also an existential condition that he himself had lived through—a profound sense of the meaninglessness of existence that is the background against which we must view the intensity of his concern with the ethical and religious spheres of existence. A polemical use of irony was the outward expression of a nihilistic standpoint. In *The Concept of Irony* the ironic standpoint (because of the purely nihilizing effects for which irony is used) is simply identified as a nihilistic standpoint.

Existential Irony

While it appears that Kierkegaard is primarily concerned with the "concept" of irony in his seminal work, it soon becomes clear that he is not concerned with this concept alone. In an implicit reversal of Hegel's procedure (i.e., to argue from the abstract, universal Idea to its manifestation in particularity), the "concept" of irony is analyzed by presenting a phenomenology of irony as it is revealed in the *existence* of Socrates. In order to understand the meaning of irony one does not begin with an a priori conception of irony; rather, one seeks to discern the nature of irony in its concrete expression in the being of an individual. In his hermeneutic analysis of Socrates' being he tries to show that Socrates displays the meaning of irony in his ironic standpoint—in his use of irony in his personal and philosophical relationships with others. For Kierkegaard, Socratic irony is a symbol or sign of the cultural emergence of the recognition of personal existence, of subjectivity. This is, indeed, a Hegelian view, insofar as Hegel maintained that irony is a manifestation of the most extreme form of subjectivity. Hegel thought that Socratic irony indicated that Socrates had formed some "Idea of the

good," but that he had (mistakenly, Hegel thought) related it to the individual in an arbitrary manner. Irony, in Socrates' hands, is only a negative moment insofar as the subject is taken to be the determining "principle" of what is good. Since Hegel believed that the individual becomes a moral being by submitting his personal subjectivity to an objective "ethical order," it is not surprising that he tended to denigrate a positive individual morality, proclaiming it impossible of attainment.⁵ Of course, Socrates (and any serious moralist) usually does not accept all aspects of the conventional morality of his time and place. In point of fact, moralists usually introduce a morality far more demanding than a legalistic morality determined in terms of conformity to civil law.

What was for Hegel only a "negative moment" in the development of the "Idea" of the good, or of moral consciousness, was for Kierkegaard the signification of the subjective concern characteristic of individuality. By undermining confidence in what Hegel described as the "universal ethos" Socrates seemed to be dangerous and subversive. By means of a combination of *elenchus* and irony Socrates showed that many individuals were not only ignorant about what they claimed to know (e.g., what piety is) but, worse than that, they were willing to act in accord with this ignorance. Irony was used by Socrates to negate claims to knowledge not only because error offended him but because he knew that what one thinks he knows will determine his actions. In the process of negation Socrates often seemed to leave no objective foundation for human knowledge standing.

Unlike a recent writer on "the philosophy of Socrates" who barely mentions irony (and, in this single reference, relates it to Socrates' "slyness"),⁶ Kierkegaard maintained that the fundamental characteristic of Socrates' existence is irony. He attributes many of the negative results of the Platonic dialogues to the annihilating effect of Socratic irony. Socrates undermines claims to knowledge and leads his opponents to hold positions that contradict their original assertions or that lead to conclusions that were implicit in their original stance, but which they sedulously wish to avoid. Irony, as Socrates uses it, is not merely a supplement to his method of *elenchus*. Rather, it is a corrosive

cutting away of pretension, comfortable certainty, and what might be called sophistic extremism (e.g., in the cases of Thrasymachus and Callicles). There is a marked tendency in Socrates' analyses to negate every objective theoretical possibility, to undermine conventional 'social' knowledge as well as the more sophisticated views of the Sophists. Is Socrates simply an arch-skeptic, a denier who can accept no holding-for-true? Is he the adept at critical reasoning who turns reason against itself? And, perhaps more importantly, why the irony?

The notion that Socratic irony is merely the nescience and self-disparagement that plays upon the surface of the Platonic dialogues is simplistic. For, irony is not merely a rhetorical device for Socrates, but it is a means by which others may be awakened to a moral self-consciousness, to a recognition of their own state of being, their own possibilities, their own capacity for an ethical existence. Socrates seems not only to be concerned that others think for themselves or with the correction of cognitive error; rather, he seems also to be concerned that others become self-reflective by leading an "examined life" in pursuit of self-knowledge. We may be sardonic toward those whom we despise and sarcastic towards those whom we wish to offend. But we are ironic toward those whom we wish to chastise or reform. We are ironic toward others when we wish them to change their thinking or their mode of life. And, finally, we are ironic toward ourselves when we realize that we are false to others or ourselves—when we know that we are not what we ought to be. For Socrates, irony is a fire that is used to burn away what is false in the thought or life of those he encounters. But it is not used to injure others or to do them an injustice; it reflects a concern for what the other is, albeit, by virtue of indirection. Kierkegaard is surely right in suspecting that there is a deeper meaning to Socratic irony than that preserved in the official view.

Irony has the capacity to induce self-consciousness in the individual to whom it is directed. It brings an apparently abstract discussion to a personal level and it suggests the faint possibility that there is a 'truth' that is other than what is conventionally accepted or other than a fashionable sophistic conceit. Surely, one can see that one of Socrates' central concerns in his use of

irony was to awaken the individual from the sleep of complacency, to generate an interrogative mode of reflection. This is not surprising, since interrogation and wonder are the beginning of philosophical self-consciousness. In raising fundamental questions about language, Being, the world, or ourselves, the process of questioning is, as Heidegger puts it in *Sein und Zeit*, a mode of being of the questioner, a reflection of a need for interrogative inquiry.⁷ At any rate, Socratic questioning is deemed necessary since the conventional, social 'knowledge' (despite some of its real practical value) that is possessed by individuals existing in a historical-cultural milieu has become solidified, crystallized into a system of interrelated notions that are ordinarily not subject to question or criticism. The conventional notions that are accepted as true in our sociocultural matrix do not comprise our own knowledge since they have not been self-consciously appropriated by ourselves. Socratic irony sought to free men from the dominance of such general, conventional notions in order that they would begin a personal search for truth. He desired to instill in others a subjective concern for philosophical questions, especially the ones that are related to the actual existence of the individual. In this regard, Kierkegaard later characterizes him as *the* existential thinker.

The destructive phase of irony is radical since its negation of every absolute seems to leave the individual with nothing. The phenomenal, conventional, socially determined world of actuality (which is usually the socially accepted world of overt behavior and ordinary language use) seems to be negated *in toto*. The philosophical opinions of the fashionable, dominant school of 'philosophy' (e.g., the Sophists), as well as the views of public common sense, are swept away and apparently nothing is left. The negation of objective certainties, Socrates seemed to believe, would lead individuals to self-conscious reflection, to an awareness of what they do not know, and to a knowledge of what they are not. In this regard, Kierkegaard believed that Socrates concerned himself with the problem of what it means to be a man. To put it in other terms, the underlying Socratic question (which Kant will later call *the* philosophical question) was: What is Man?⁸

Irony, then, was ultimately in the service of the question that

Kant had said encompassed the questions: What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope? For Kierkegaard, the answer to the question "What is Man?" is related to the only two meaningful modes of existence, namely, being an ethical individual or becoming a Christian. 'The Socratic questioning of oneself lies at the heart of Kierkegaard's concept of a mastered irony that contributes to the development of an ethical existence. Though an official encyclopedia of philosophy assures us that Socratic irony "contributed nothing to later [philosophical] developments,"⁹ it is clear that Kierkegaard outdid Socrates in his mastery of irony. A philosophical use of irony is the most pervasive characteristic of all of Kierkegaard's writings . . . except, of course, his edifying discourses. This is true even of his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, an intricate analysis of the movements of faith that is a dialectical defense of the possibility of faith (*Troen*). Kierkegaard without his irony may be mistaken for a dogmatist, which is precisely what he was not.

In the *Concept of Irony* Kierkegaard emphasizes the fundamental negativity (*Negativitet*) of irony and refers repeatedly to its "infinite nothingness." Irony is the antithesis of conventional actuality; it is, by implication, a condemnation of actuality and is oriented in the direction of the ideal infinity of the possible. To be ironic in relation toward what is conventionally praised as virtue, for example, is to suggest that there is a higher mode of virtue that has not yet been recognized. To be ironic in relation to a metaphysical theory (as Kierkegaard was towards Hegel's metaphysics) is to suggest that something essential has been left out of the theory and that the claim to absolute truth in such a *Weltanschauung* is illicit.

In general, ironic expressions reveal contrasts, contradictions, paradoxes, or oppositions. The basic contrast is between what is and what could be, between conventional actuality and possibility, between a more or less universally accepted metaphysics (e.g., a metaphysics of language) and alternative "idealities." From the finite perspective of man—a man who adopts the ironic standpoint—there is only a multiplicity of possibilities. Thus, for Socrates, it is possible that it is better to be dead than alive; it is possible that after death we may continue to exist as we did

on earth or it is possible that, as Schopenhauer put it, "before us there is certainly only nothingness." It is possible (i.e., it is a "likely story," or *mythos*) that the soul preexisted its present embodiment. It is possible, as the ancients held, that the unjust will be punished for their misdeeds. As he is represented in the dialogues, the dominant modality of Socrates' thought is that of possibility. There is, Kierkegaard suggests, an intimate relationship among irony, possibility, and authentic existence.

Ordinarily, irony is conceived of as a method of dissimulating, of hiding one's true motives or feelings; in effect, it is a critical standpoint that conveys the possibility of the recognition of a truth that is, perhaps, inexpressible or is of such a nature that it cannot be apodictically demonstrated, but that is "seen" in evidential intuition or is directly encountered in lived experience. In addition, of course, irony also involves the recognition of the multiplicity of possibilities that confront one in finite experience and that is accompanied by the multiplicity of theoretical explanations of various phenomena that are themselves possibilities. The radical contrast between the ideal (e.g., conceived of as a hypothetical possibility) and the actual creates the conceptual and psychological *tension* of irony. The philosophical ironist, by juxtaposing the contradictory, makes the paradoxical manifest. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Kierkegaard remarks that the ironist places himself as a "vanishing particularity" in relation to the "absolute requirement" of the ethical or the religious mode of being.¹⁰ In this process is revealed the fundamental difficulty in human existence: the synthesizing of differences. The skeptical nature of irony (which, in a dialectical manner, always seems to suggest an alternative possibility in the face of any given possibility, practical or theoretical), the conceptual recognition of the irreconcilability of opposites, the host of paradoxes that irony reveals, the dizzying sense of 'infinite' possibility, turns the individual back upon himself and recalls him to the most significant possibilities, those that are uniquely his own. In the light of Kierkegaard's repeated emphasis on the role that irony plays in forcing the individual to reflect upon his own being, his own "potentiality-for," it is clear why Kierkegaard insists that no authentic human existence is possible without irony.¹¹

The ironic standpoint has a tragic dimension insofar as its very skepticism concerning any absolute seems to preclude subjective commitment to anything. Theoretical nihilism is immobilizing. If nothing can be known, if no metaphysics seems to answer what Schopenhauer and Kant called the "metaphysical need" in man, if there is certainty nowhere, how can I possibly know what I ought to do or what I ought to become? If the quest for certainty (as Dewey called it) cannot be satisfied, does this not affect our capacity for resoluteness? A purely theoretical use of irony as a negating device ineluctably leads to a nihilistic impasse. In the Protean world of the ironist one can accept nothing as true and nothing, therefore, has a secure foundation.

The ironist is concerned with the mere play of possibilities, with the entertainment of a multiplicity of hypothetical explanations of a variety of phenomena. In regard to this characterization, it is interesting to note the importance that hypothesis played in Socrates' approach to philosophical questions. For a hypothesis is always a *possible*, tentative explanation, a conjecture that is acceptable (at least *pro tempore*) insofar as it "saves the phenomena." Whenever Socrates seems to be answering a specific question or providing an explanation for some phenomenon he couches his answer or explanation in a hypothetical form. Socrates rarely expresses himself in the assertoric mode. When dealing with the most pressing philosophical issues, Socrates invariably chooses to speak in the modality of possibility. To speak of a Socratic "thesis" (i.e., that knowledge is virtue) is misleading,¹² since the nature of the 'knowledge' he is referring to is by no means clear. To be sure, Kierkegaard also believed that a positive ethics underlies his irony, even though he disagrees with others about the precise meaning of the Socratic ethics.

In his phenomenology of the being of Socrates in *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard was concerned with the negative or ironic phase of his ethical transformation. Socrates is pictured—as Kierkegaard will later describe him in his *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*—as the arch-dialectician who was concerned with an ironic consideration of theoretical possibilities.¹³ Kierkegaard tries to uncover the "hidden" Socrates, to discern

the existing individual beneath the enigmatic mask. That this phenomenology of Socrates' being was an imaginative, hermeneutic analysis colored by Kierkegaard's own ironic nihilism goes without saying. It was the latter's view that Socrates had used irony both to bring others to self-reflective moral consciousness and to cut away all support for any conceptual, objective certainty. Like the Buddha, Socrates is silent or bluntly skeptical in regard to all questions concerning man's positive knowledge of transcendent reality.

The overall tendency of what Kierkegaard calls the ironic standpoint is to reduce all things to possibility, to negate apodictic certainty, to "level everything," to become engrossed in the mere play of logical analyses or destructive criticism. For the ironist there is no objective truth, but only a multiplicity of possible "truths." From a psychological point of view, the ironist cannot commit himself to anything, cannot be decisive about anything. In *The Concept of Irony* Kierkegaard was trying to extract the polemical kernel from the various portraits of Socrates (he provides expositions of the works of Plato, Aristophanes, and Xenophon in order to elucidate the thought of Socrates) in anticipation of his own polemical approach to speculative philosophy in general and to that of Hegel in particular. In addition, of course, he endeavored to objectify his own nihilism in order to dissect it and, hopefully, to transcend it. His own conceptual-imaginative reflection upon possibilities without any conviction or commitment was clearly projected into his phenomenological portrait of Socrates. Kierkegaard had seen in Socrates the same refusal of certainty and objective truth that characterized his own thinking at the time. In attempting to understand Socratic irony he was trying desperately to understand himself.

For Kierkegaard, the ironic standpoint is a *via negativa*, "not the truth, but the way."¹⁴ What I have called the nihilism of reflection is characterized by the critical analysis of every claim to truth, every philosophical generalization. Insofar as every holding-for-true can be doubted, can be put in question, the dialectic of reflection invariably leads to an "infinite" process. For, what is to bring such critical reflection to an end? Reflection unguided by any subjectively posited *telos*, reflection indepen-

dent of the influence of a personal or intellectual commitment, will tend to lead to an ironic or nihilistic standpoint. However, so long as irony prevails there is always the haunting suggestion, the possibility, that some "ideality" (some general metaphysical assertion, some universal principle) may be true, even though it may be inaccessible to objective reflection.

The kind of knowledge that Socrates wished to convey was not a dogmatic, metaphysical truth, but what Kierkegaard calls an existential communication. That is, irony is an instrument of a dialogical dialectic that intends to make others aware of the importance of a moral transformation of the self. The aim of Socratic irony is not to transmit objective, eternal truths but to arouse the one to whom it is directed to exist as a reflective, self-critical individual. Socrates' role as an ironic gadfly was not in the service of a doctrine or an abstract, aprioristic truth; it served, rather, to bring the individual to a concern for his own being—to personal knowledge, the kind of knowledge that Socrates felt was essential.

Hermann Diem, in his *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Existence*, makes explicit the implicit character of Socratic irony when he remarks that the conversation between man and man liberates each of them to live in his own right and suggests, further, a possibility of existence for each.¹⁵ Existential communication, he avers, ineluctably takes the form of possibility. The possibilities suggested by Socratic irony are, of course, personal, existential ones, those concernful possibilities that, when acted upon, can change the meaning and purpose of an individual's life. Only by indirection, Kierkegaard later emphasized, can one individual bring another individual to a search for ethical self-being. "Know thyself" is a demanding injunction; but Socrates seemed to believe that the sincere pursuit of self-knowledge was a necessary propaedeutic to the possibility of ethical self-being. In this regard, irony was used in order to bring the other to a search for what Kierkegaard calls "concernful knowledge." When irony is directed to another person the suggestion is that one knows that he ought to be other than he is. As Kierkegaard will write in his journals, ethics is concerned with a communication of a potentiality-for (*kunnen*) becoming a self,¹⁶ of a specific

kind of knowledge, self-knowledge. If the ironist is negative in regard to objective truth, he is, by implication, deeply concerned with a subjectively apprehended certainty concerning what one ought to be. This, Kierkegaard suggests, was the aim of the dialectical, nihilating effects of Socratic irony.

In the face of the possibility of an eternal life or nothingness, Socrates retained his irony, entertaining—as Kierkegaard puts it—a syllogistic *aut . . . aut* (either/or), a playful consideration of the possibility that either this or that may be true.¹⁷ This attitude of mind is itself doubly ironic insofar as Socrates (or Plato through Socrates) had presented a number of arguments in defense of the immortality of the soul. Objective uncertainty does not disturb Socrates. He seems to possess a subjective certainty that gives him the self-mastery characteristic of an ethically self-conscious individual. There is, as Kierkegaard suggests, an "ideality" that functions as an ideal goal and gives meaning and purpose to Socrates' life; but it is neither an objective truth, nor an ultimate, transcendental reality, nor a knowledge about the nature of the totality of reality.

For Kierkegaard, Socrates represented the individual who had attacked objective knowledge (by virtue of his ironic negations or skeptical uncertainty) in order to make room for the possibility of a search for subjective knowledge (that is, knowledge of the self). The ignorance that Socrates thought leads to immorality or injustice is not ignorance of some objective, universal moral principle; rather, it is ignorance of oneself. The problem with ironic reflection is that it tends to put off decision—to inhibit wholesale commitment to an ideal or a goal. As Kierkegaard describes Socrates, he is an individual who is unable to leap into anything; hence, he leaps back into himself in inwardness (*Indeligheden*).¹⁸ Kierkegaard believed that the "cleansing baptism of irony" not only sweeps away irrelevancies but rejuvenates and regenerates the sense of one's own existence and recalls one to one's essential ethical possibilities. Though he sometimes tries to think of Socrates as a proto-Christian "man of faith," he realizes that Socrates was the paradigm of the critical, self-reflective, existential thinker who endeavored to attain an authentic existence outside faith. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* the

inwardness of Socrates is described as an analogy to faith, not as faith itself. Irony marks the emergence of self-consciousness and the consciousness of possibility. For Socrates, existence as a human being is not a *fait accompli* but a task to be accomplished. Though it may be the case that ironic tension may be sustained because it leads one to a recognition of the possibility of a higher being, a transcendent reality, and dramatizes the distinction between the conditioned and the unconditioned,¹⁹ it is anachronistic to suggest that Socrates arrived at an intuitive awareness of God. While it is true, as Edmund Husserl says in his *Erste Philosophie*, that Socrates practices a critique or ultimate evaluation of his life's goals and, by virtue of this, his "ways of life and changing means," Kierkegaard would not agree that Socrates was concerned with "clarifying reflections" that culminate in "apodictic self-evidence"²⁰—unless that is, Husserl was referring to Socrates' concern to find a basis for certainty and resoluteness in an intense, self-critical reflection upon his own being.

For Socrates, there is no apodictic certainty that there is a transcendental being or realm of perfection, nor is there apodictic certainty concerning the nature of phenomena. Socratic irony comes full circle when it is directed against the self, when it is directed to one's own actuality as a means of recalling oneself to the "ideality" (which is an 'object' of thought or imagination) that one can attempt to realize existentially. There are, for Kierkegaard, three fundamental uses of irony: (1) as an instrument for destroying all objective certainty, all metaphysical absolutes, i.e., a nihilistic irony; (2) as an aestheticism that negates all actuality and projects an imaginative ideality that can never be realized, i.e., romantic irony; and (3) as a means by which the individual posits an ethical *telos* that serves as the ideality that contrasts with the actuality of the imperfect self that one has been or is now, i.e., an ethical irony. The tension produced by constantly juxtaposing the ethical ideal and the present imperfect actuality of the self is central to Kierkegaard's conception of ethical self-consciousness. In this sense irony, since it is described as a "determination of subjectivity,"²¹ can be the sign of the possibility of an ethical "turn." Before examining the details of the ethical sphere of existence, however, we must at-

tempt to discover precisely what nihilism meant to Kierkegaard and how his understanding of it is related to some important philosophical conceptions of its nature.

Forms of Nihilism

Though nihilism, as a serious philosophical problem, has only come into prominence in Western thought with the writings of Nietzsche, there has been no general agreement concerning the nature of nihilism, and Nietzsche himself discerned a variety of forms of it. Basically, there seem to be three fundamental forms that nihilism has assumed in Western thought: (1) theoretical or philosophical nihilism; (2) psychological nihilism, often described as decadence; and (3) activist nihilism, i.e., a sociopolitically motivated nihilism of action as manifested in the Russian nihilism of the nineteenth century (what might be called, after Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Children*, Bazarov's syndrome!), in Nazi Germany, and in the sporadic violent activity of various radical political groups. It is Nietzsche, of course, who has provided the most thorough analyses of theoretical (and psychological) nihilism. Gorgias' sophistic attempts to show that "nothing exists" cannot be classified as a serious form of nihilism, even though some elements in his arguments are compatible with a theoretical nihilism.

Socrates' critique of conventional knowledge certainly had its polemical, nihilistic phase in its relentless attack upon commonly accepted concepts and values in the Greek society of his day. However, as Kierkegaard argued in the *The Concept of Irony*, this negativity was, of course, in the service of an ethics of subjectivity. Socratic wisdom is 'ignorance', the realization that, for man, there is nothing that has objective certainty. His irony was, as I have said, an indirect transmission of the necessity for the transformation of the self, the communication, as Kierkegaard puts it in his journals, of "capability."²² Socrates' role as a "gadfly" was not in the service of an abstract metaphysical truth; rather, it sought to bring the individual to seek personal knowledge, to attempt to become what he knows he ought to be. Kierkegaard later admits that his phenomenological portrait of Socrates was "one-

sided" insofar as he exaggerated his negativity. But, in one sense, he did uncover some aspects of Socrates' existence that have not been discerned by many others. That is, his negation of scientific inquiry, his apparent indifference to his impending death (Nietzsche, psychologist that he was, saw the significance of Socrates' comment before dying—"O Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius"—insofar as he noted that this was an allusion to a customary offering to the god of medicine when one had recovered from an illness, the illness being, in this case, life itself),²³ his casual humor in the face of important metaphysical questions, and, finally those skeptical doubts of his, which reveal an undercurrent of Pyrrhonism. Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche branded Socrates (at one time or another) a nihilist.

Ironically, while Kierkegaard thought that Socrates' passionate and reasoned pursuit of moral excellence indicated that he had, for the most part, overcome a nihilistic strain in his personality and thought, Nietzsche criticizes precisely this "lack of objective interest" on Socrates' part, this "moralic acid" that ostensibly "poisoned" Greek consciousness, and sees in the morality that Socrates desired to make instinctive signs of decadence rather than strength. But even Nietzsche could not overcome a sympathetic antipathy for Socrates. At one time he characterized Socrates as "that great ironist, so rich in secrets," the first *Lebensphilosoph*, the master dialectician, and, in almost Kierkegaardian tones, he admired his spiritual courage, his self-control, his self-mastery, or, in a word, his capacity for *Selbstüberwindung* (self-overcoming). It is this affirmative core of Socrates' being and thought that precludes any conclusive charge of nihilism.²⁴

In Nietzsche's analysis of "the known" (*das Bekannte*) we can see an aspect of critical philosophy not unlike that of Socrates. Nietzsche argues that what is generally accepted as knowledge is, for the most part, based upon fundamental assumptions uncritically accepted, upon conventionally adopted linguistic forms, and upon the encrusted meanings that traditional concepts acquire. Nietzsche's skepticism (which, ultimately, is in the service of his metaphysics of the "Will to Power") resembles that of Socrates insofar as his critical attacks are launched against hallowed notions and commonly accepted beliefs. To be sure,

the knife of his nihilism is double-edged and can be used to negate his own positive philosophical views. Indeed, what he proclaimed the most extreme form of nihilism—the meaningless, perpetually recurring—is nothing but his own notion of the eternal recurrence of "the same." As in the case of Socrates or, for that matter, the early Kierkegaard, his critical attacks on 'will', causality, the Cartesian ego, etc., seemed to have been the means by which he could defend his own affirmation of Dionysian existence, self-mastery, self-overcoming, self-realization, and what, in general, resembles, in some respects, Kierkegaard's own conception of ethical existence.

Nietzsche's central conception of nihilism is that it is the view that existence must not be interpreted in terms of 'purpose', 'unity', 'Being', or 'truth'. For the Nietzschean nihilist there is no 'true' world at all. Or, as Kierkegaard expressed it in *The Concept of Irony*, nihilism means the negation of the meaning of actuality. The "feeling of valuelessness" is at the heart of nihilism as Nietzsche understands it. To be sure, he also describes the psychological effects of nihilism in states of spiritual exhaustion.

In *Either/Or* and in his journals Kierkegaard describes the psychological experience of nihilism as a spiritual incapacity for commitment or action, a subjective sense of emptiness, and a feeling of the senselessness of actuality. While Nietzsche engaged in a critical, rational, analysis of basic concepts in Western thought, Kierkegaard seemed to conceive of nihilism in relation to the transformation of everything into conceptual-imaginative possibilities or a state of unending critical reflection. However, both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, in entirely different ways, reached the conclusion (later repeated by Unamuno and others) that thought is and ought to be in the service of life. In both instances reflection and thought were to be turned upon concrete existence, to conserve and preserve what Unamuno called "the tragic sense of life" and what Kierkegaard called the "dialectical tension of existence." What is probably not appreciated too much by those who have tried to understand Kierkegaard is that he, too, was radically skeptical in his thinking—that he denied, in effect, that man could have apodictic knowledge concerning history, nature, "the world," or the totality of reality. In the

Concluding Unscientific Postscript (a work clearly described as a "thought-experiment") Kierkegaard maintains that all knowledge about nonexistent 'reality' is an abrogation of its actuality insofar as it is translated into the sphere of the conceptually possible. Objective knowledge is provisional, hypothetical, and experimental for Kierkegaard as well as for Nietzsche. For Kierkegaard, as we shall see, there is an ineluctable asymptotic relationship between conceptualization and actuality that permanently bars objective certitude. In a sense, he, like Nietzsche, regarded our "infinitely complex cathedral of concepts" [*Begriffsdome*] as inadequate for an understanding of the world or "reality." On the other hand, both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche seem incapable of doubting propositions that refer to immediate experiences or to the concrete actuality of the self. Both are skeptical concerning man's rational capacity to attain complete knowledge. Nietzsche, if anything, is not as skeptical in this regard as Kierkegaard. Both have a post-Kantian appreciation of the limits of reason. Paraphrasing Kant, we may say (to put it in simplistic terms) that Nietzsche attacked reason in order to make room for a "religion of life," and that Kierkegaard attacked reason in order to make room for an authentic ethical existence and a life of faith.

While Heidegger's conception of nihilism is peculiar to his own ontological reformation, his generalization concerning the "planetary, all-corroding, many-faceted irresistibility" of nihilism today is by no means exaggerated. For the crisis in the question of truth that Heidegger has wrestled with is central to contemporary nihilism. The reduction of all truth to tautologies, analytic statements, and empirical propositions (that have been or could be verified or confirmed) may seem to be an improvement upon the grandiose claims of metaphysicians. However, it has created a psychological and conceptual vacuum that has been filled (and that is continuously being filled) in this century by a variety of fanatical ideologies. Furthermore, Heidegger's attempt to discover the ontological ground of propositional truth (especially the correspondence theory of truth) is a heroic attempt that is desperately needed in a time of restrictive, dogmatic concepts of truth. Even those who have attempted to delimit the

range of truth and meaning—for example, the Wittgenstein of *Tractatus-Logico Philosophicus*—have found themselves in the position of negating in their conclusions the very assertions that led them to their conclusions. Or to put it another way, they have negated the truth of those propositions which asserted the limits of meaning or truth.²⁵ How Kierkegaard would have relished such paradoxes!

For Heidegger, at any rate, nihilism means "the forgetfulness of Being," the loss of the understanding of the "Being of beings [*Seiendes*]."²⁶ And it is said that nihilism has been implicit in Western philosophy since Plato and has found its overt culmination in Nietzsche.²⁷ Such a grandiose claim is practically impossible to substantiate, and it robs the concept of nihilism of much of its meaning. Moreover, the projection of the recognition of the "presence" (*Anwesen*) of Being back to the pre-Socratic philosophers smacks of nothing so much as philosophical romanticism. Heidegger makes of nihilism not, as Stanley Rosen has called it in his study of *Nihilism*, "a permanent possibility for man,"²⁸ but the underlying theme of Western thought and experience. To hold that nihilism is subjectivism, and to find this "subjectivism" in philosophers as diverse as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and Nietzsche, is not "originating thought" but philosophical idiosyncrasy. While many have seen in Heidegger's *Being and Time* the very subjectivism that he identifies as nihilistic, I would hold that insofar as Heidegger is concerned with authentically existing *Dasein*, with the individuating aspects of human existence, his fundamental ontology is not nihilistic. For *Dasein* is the discoverer and sustainer of meaning. In the authentic existence of an individual *Dasein* 'truth' comes to be in time. To ground all meaning and significance in Being (*das Sein*), as the later Heidegger has done, to abandon the 'essence' of man to the mysterious *Abgrund*, to believe that the mission of Being (*das Geschick des Seins*) is "fate" (the ancient Greek *Moirai* in Heideggerian disguise) as the "the confrontation of Being and the being of man" (*Der Satz vom Grund*),²⁹ is to betray the spirit of existentialism and is, in effect, to negate the intrinsic meaningfulness of human existence as it is painfully won by authentic individuals or in the authenticity of human lives. If Kierkegaard

were alive today, he would have to attack the later Heidegger in the same spirit as he attacked Hegel. Heidegger criticizes one form of nihilism (anthropocentric subjectivism), but simultaneously surrenders his defense of authentic subjectivity.

An alien, inhuman, transcendent Absolute has returned to haunt Western thought, an Absolute that mysteriously manifests itself in time, history, *Dasein*, and works of art. What is the individual *Dasein* in relation to this secularized Absolute? He is virtually nothing. In Heidegger's attempt to penetrate the ineffable and to say the unsayable we have the closest analogy in Western thought to *Śūnyavāda*.³⁰ Against those philosophers who are sympathetic to Heidegger, this does not seem to be a discovery of new wisdom; it is a sign *not* of philosophical rejuvenation but of cultural and philosophical exhaustion. Let Kierkegaard's remark in his journals stand as a commentary on some of Heidegger's later philosophical utterances. There are times, Kierkegaard writes, when one experiences a spiritual phenomenon that may be described as a kind of oriental reverie in the infinite in which everything appears to be reconciled—the being of the entire world, the being of God, and my own being itself. All the disparities of life, the sheer multiplicity of actuality—everything is reconciled in a misty, dreamy state. "But then . . . I wake up again, and . . . the tragic relativity in everything begins worse than ever, the endless questions about *what I am* . . . what I am doing . . . [and one suspects that] at the same time perhaps millions are doing the same."³¹

The only absolute that the nihilist can tolerate (Kierkegaard tells us) is infinite negativity itself. For both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche the category of Being is empty or, as Nietzsche put it, it is a "cloudy streak of evaporating reality."³² The emphasis of the theoretical nihilist is upon radical change, impermanence, the insubstantiality of all phenomena, the negativity that Hegel described (in his *Science of Logic*) as immanent in finite beings.³³ When the nihilist asserts that "nothing is," he means that nothing is permanent, that there is no being (whether an *ens rationis* or an actual being) that is exempt from the nihilating effect of temporality. Buddhist dialecticians had often appealed to the relativity of experience (as Gorgias himself did), the im-

permanence of actuality, the radical contingency of all existence, the unending flux of phenomena, in order to show the unreality of phenomenal actuality (in any absolute sense). However, aside from the *nāstika* philosophers,³⁴ even Buddhists who argued for the impermanence of actuality (Nagarjuna) postulated the possibility of the transcendent, the *Sunya* ("void"), which is not nothing, but is that ineffable, ultimate reality that rationalistic categories are unable to describe.

A consistent nihilism is a rare phenomenon. It is rare because it is ultimately self-negating and self-refuting. What is curious about the nihilist is, as Nietzsche saw, that he would rather have nothingness as his purpose than have no purpose at all. In the case of Kierkegaard, at least, his own nihilistic tendencies, his theoretical skepticism, led him to seek self-knowledge in order that he might have a constructive, subjectively apprehended *telos*. Ironically, Nietzsche, in his metaphysics (i.e., in the doctrine of eternal recurrence and in the notion of an impersonal cosmic will to power), undermined his central existentialist standpoint. If life, as he said, affirms itself through me, if the will to power acts through the individual, then the I-consciousness that he ostensibly defended is obliterated.³⁵ In this respect, Kierkegaard was more consistent in his existentialist emphasis on the primacy of individual being. His conception of nihilism is, in general, compatible with that of Nietzsche even though he thought that only an ethical or religious existence could overcome its uncanny negative power.

Whereas Nietzsche examined, in an almost exhaustive manner, the various modalities of nihilism—religious nihilism (typified, he thought, by Christianity and Buddhism), pathological nihilism, the nihilism of action, sociopolitical nihilism (which was primarily identified with Prussian militarism, socialism, communism, etc.)—Kierkegaard characterizes nihilism as the end-product, as it were, of critical reflection or the purely polemical use of reason. Corresponding to this persistent critical reflection in the psychological realm there is a personal sense of pointlessness, purposelessness, and meaninglessness. The contradictions of a multiplicity of metaphysical beliefs or systems seem to leave only a series of unresolved antinomies. This understanding of

nihilism can only emerge after a recognition of the historical perspective, a sense of alternative systems or methods of philosophy, a sensitivity to a multiplicity of conceptual possibilities. The much-heralded historical consciousness that Hegel (more than any other single thinker) introduces into Western thought proved to be a mixed blessing. It led, as we can see in the case of Wilhelm Dilthey, to a sense of the "chaos of relativities," to the destruction of "the belief in the absolute validity of any one philosophy," to the type of historicism that is a prelude to dogmatic ideology.³⁶ Kierkegaard had already understood Dilthey's later discovery of the "liberation" of human consciousness from rigidity and tradition. But he saw, psychologist that he was, that this liberation exacted a cost that one might not be willing to pay. What is the individual to do when faced with the chaos of relativities that historical consciousness and the history of philosophy reveals? It was Kierkegaard's daring that allowed him (before Nietzsche) to see in his own skeptical dialectic of reflection a sphere or stage in human existence that could be "lived-through" by anyone, that had already been experienced (perhaps) by Socrates, and that would no doubt be experienced by many. What *The Concept of Irony* signified, I believe, was the recognition of the "nihilistic standpoint" as a possibility for man in any age. The first path on the dialectic of life is not the aesthetic sphere of existence but a nihilistic sphere that, for Kierkegaard, must be lived through for some meaningful *telos* to be discovered or created by the individual.³⁷

Contrary to the view of Stanley Rosen (in his philosophical essay on nihilism), I would hold that there *are* a diversity of forms of nihilism. In one sense, he is right in averring that, for the nihilist, "everything is permitted"—that the nihilist can attribute value to anything by an "arbitrary resolution."³⁸ But this is only one side of the nihilistic coin. We must supplement it with the correlative psychological aspects of a sincere (and not a superficial) nihilism. We are dealing with a phenomenon that is a cognitive-affective state, not merely a purely theoretical "standpoint."

The gradually emerging challenge to what have been the traditional religious *Weltanschauungen* of the Western world tended to undermine all metaphysical beliefs. The nihilism of reflection

that Kierkegaard examined in *The Concept of Irony* is a late cultural product, a sign of both intellectual fertility as well as of theoretical syncretism. The dramatic influence that oriental thought had on Schopenhauer (and others of the nineteenth century) was only one case in point. In a multiplicity of forms, the underlying malaise of nineteenth-century European thought was revealed in a kind of spiritual exhaustion, the dissolution of the rationalist tradition. Even in Hegel one sometimes senses that there is a looking backward upon something that has already been accomplished—that the end of a tradition has come, that a summary of the evolution of Western thought can now be made, that, in effect, reason can do no more. This is epitomized in his much quoted remark in the *Philosophy of Right* that "when philosophy paints its grey in grey [an allusion to Goethe's *Faust*], then has a form of life grown old. By philosophy's grey in grey it cannot be rejuvenated, but only understood. The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk."³⁹

As the nineteenth century comes to a close, there are numerous dithyrambic attempts to preserve the notion of the infinite, the eternal. But the oppressive, negating analytical force of reason is overpowering. The *Weltschmerz* of romantic poets and novelists infiltrates philosophy. Schopenhauer counsels the extinction of the will, and Mainländer and von Hartmann advise the cessation of procreation: since human existence is obviously so painful, one must negate the unconscious will to live, one must see that it is better that nothing come into being at all. The total intellectual-psychological atmosphere of Germanic pessimism must be seen as at least the central background for Kierkegaard's conception of nihilism. The pessimism of the nineteenth century was not only, as Nietzsche called it, "a preliminary form of nihilism." Rather, it was already one of its covert manifestations. Psychologically, what seems to underlie nihilistic pessimism is a deep-seated despair, a subjective sense of spiritual emptiness, a disdain for, if not a hatred of, finite actuality.

It is in the writings of the Italian poet Leopardi that we find the ultimate crescendo of nihilistic pessimism. In his *Zibaldone* he exclaims: "All that exists is evil; that everything exists is an evil. Everything exists only to achieve evil; existence itself is an

evil. . . . There is no other good than nonexistence." Such an extreme pessimism is not unknown to Kierkegaard; it is expressed in some of his last journal entries, in his charge that one comes into existence by means of a crime, that existence itself is a crime, that the world is a prison-house from which the only escape is death.⁴⁰ Temperamentally, Kierkegaard was at one with the romantic pessimists even though his conceptions of authentic existence and the possibility of faith saved him from the lure of nihilism. If Kierkegaard often verges on an ethical or religious position resembling what Albert Schweitzer called "world-and-life-negation," he is rescued from such extremism by virtue of his faith in the capacity, which some men have, of endeavoring to achieve an authentic, individual existence. In addition, of course, he could never lead himself to deny the reality of the concrete immediacy of particular existence. This, as I shall try to show, played an important role in his description of the ethical sphere of existence. For Kierkegaard, nihilism did not mean (as Stanley Rosen claims it does) "discontinuity" but rather the dissolution of the sense of actuality, of the meaning of concrete actuality. In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Kierkegaard remarks that skepticism is a form of idealism; he might just as well have said that, in a sense, nihilism is a peculiar form of 'idealism', for it suggests that one is already, for better or worse, a part of a peculiar 'identity', and that one can "let go." Translated into the language of Buddhism, it is the recognition that *sāmsāra* is *nirvāna*.⁴¹ But the recurring question that Kierkegaard raises is: if actuality is meaningless, is not then my own concrete, immediate existence meaningless, unreal? But this is impossible! I know that I am actual, that I exist. If I know anything at all, I know this. I cannot assert the denial of my own existence without implicit self-refutation. The heart of all of Kierkegaard's writings is his emphasis upon the existential reality of individual existence. Everything else may be objectively uncertain, but I cannot seriously deny the actuality of my own existence. Man, for Kierkegaard, is the only actuality that can know itself in its own concrete reality in and through its consciousness of its immediacy. He denies the formula of Descartes, *cogito ergo sum*, but expresses his own: *sum ergo cogito*.

Kierkegaard, like Socrates, could not wield his critical, polemical intelligence against his own actuality. This certitude of his own existence—even in moments of despair or hopelessness—was the cornerstone upon which he built his conception of the dialectic of life. To be sure, he did have the kind of temperament that led him to be sensitive to the relativity of his own experiences, the endless flux of phenomena, the diversity of forms of life, the mutability of all finite entities, the transience of all phenomena. Like all thinkers who have a proclivity toward skepticism, he was keenly aware of multiplicity, diversity, various points of view, and the variety of forms of explanation. More importantly, perhaps, he was sensitive to his own mutability, to the complexity of his own being. In *Either/Or* he remarks that "When I consider the different periods into which [my life] falls, it seems like the word *Schnur* in the dictionary, which means in the first place a string, in the second, a daughter-in-law. The only thing lacking is that the word *Schnur* should mean in the third place a camel, in the fourth, a dust-brush."⁴² This self-conscious, self-reflective recognition of the multiplicity within the apparent unity of the self in an indication that there is, indeed, a relationship between the subjective sense of meaninglessness and subjectivism. In this regard, Kierkegaard is quite correct in relating the ironic standpoint to subjectivity. It is surely the radical contradictions in one's own life experiences, the sheer multiplicity that one experiences in existence (the confusing aspects of life that are either ignored by most philosophers or are shunted aside as irrelevant phenomena that "reason" does not deign to consider), the sensitivity to various points of view, that tend to nullify the attempt to "fit" experience into rigid categories of a pure rationalism or logical analysis.

Concrete, immediate experience or existence is neither unintelligible nor transparent to reason; rather it is, as Kierkegaard suggests, the most difficult phenomenon to understand. The dissimilarity of individual experiences and modes of thought (as Gorgias had already suggested) is one of the fundamental bases of philosophical nihilism. When one emphasizes continuity, the immutable, the permanent, the constants of thought, the unities discernible within multiplicities, the patterns or *Gestalten* of

experience, the universal, the repeatable, the nomological, the nihilistic standpoint seems to disintegrate. But once we reflect upon oppositions, contradictions, paradoxes, dialectical relations, the gratuitous nature of empirical events, the complexity of even the most apparently simple act or process, the apparently stochastic aspects of existence, the complex unity of specificity and multiplicity, the subjective sense of the chaotic character of "the world" emerges again. Radical change, specificity, and apparently random multiplicity seem to undermine the unifying tendency of human reason, the need for order.

While Kierkegaard sometimes allows himself the luxury of a misanthropic nihilism, his occasional sense of what Nietzsche called the "in vain" never entirely destroyed his faith in man's potentiality-for authentic existence. Ultimately, nihilism entails the negation of reflection or thought as an end in itself since its affirmation is its own negation. The paradox of nihilism is that it can never be 'true'. Dialectically, as in Kierkegaard's case, it turns the individual back upon himself, upon his own immediacy. Psychologically, the individual who has lived through nihilism, who has felt its corrosive power, can neither return to a pre-philosophical position of naive realism nor to a state of pervasive hopelessness or despair. He is now open to the possibility of faith. I do not mean by this religious faith alone, but a faith in himself, in morality, in existence, in the immediacy of actuality, in the capacity to understand. William James rightly remarked that rationalism itself is based upon a *faith* in the power of reason.⁴³ Insofar as nihilism awakens the individual to a realization of what Heidegger will later call the uncanniness of existence it has had a productive function, it has cleared away the inessential and the trivial, the commonplace and the conventional, it has, in effect, led the individual to seek a mooring for his own existence that will have meaning for himself, if not for others as well. The transcendence of the nihilistic standpoint is made possible by virtue of the capacity for the negation of this theoretical negation. For Kierkegaard, this is the basis for the 'movement' of the self toward the openness of the future.

Nihilism is not, as is often said, an irrationalist position; rather, it is the result of careful, critical, rational analysis. It is the ulti-

mate by-product of skepticism and doubt. Through the negative, destructive use of reason, reason itself is undermined. The antinomies of conceived possibilities negate each other and there is a subtle erosion of the concept of truth. Theoretically, nihilism means *the impossibility of objective knowledge*. That is, knowledge of "the" world is impossible because the world that is "known" is a phenomenon derived from interpretation, a construction of what is ostensibly 'given' in terms of a variety of conceptual schema that are themselves subject to revision. The attempt to arrive at a wholly objective understanding of a world interpreted on the basis of historically conditioned human thought, language, and experience—a world that is ostensibly known in its independent being—by relying on culturally, historically determined thought, language, and experience is presumably not possible. Heidegger, perhaps more than any contemporary philosopher, has instructed us in the contingency of every previously accepted ontology of "the world," has shown us that our relationship to "the world" (i.e., how we think of it and experience it) has been conditioned by dominant ontological, conceptual schema that have been inherited from the past. Unfortunately, the questions he raised about such ontological schema suggest that there has never been (and may never be) a world in which man lives, but rather a variety of "worlds."

It may be asked whether any philosopher (other than Nietzsche, perhaps) has ever realized that if a *Weltanschauung* that has dominated the thought and experience of millions of individuals is shown to be false (or is conceived of as false) or is put in question, then the possibility emerges that no *Weltanschauung* (no matter how convincing it may seem at present) is valid. This does not, of course, apply only to questionable metaphysical systems, for this kind of skepticism affects every holding-for-true, every hypothesis, presupposition, assumption, or logically primitive concept. In this sense, nihilism is the negation of the possibility of attaining the truth—the negation of truth, knowledge, and certainty is itself negated in the very process of asserting it. Hence, the philosopher or the reflective individual must begin again from another standpoint. Ultimately, what the nihilist finds most difficult to deny is his own actual existence.

The ironic nihilist whom Kierkegaard describes in the guise of Socrates is able to reduce every objective possibility to negativity (e.g., perhaps there is a moral world order or perhaps there are no moral phenomena, as Nietzsche said, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena; perhaps language pictures the world or perhaps language constitutes a linguistic 'world' that bears no relationship to the world of actuality), to convert every objective 'truth' into a mere possibility. However, neither Socrates nor Kierkegaard turn their critical analysis upon the self in its concrete actuality. The pursuit of self-knowledge is the beginning of an ethical existence. For Socrates, as well as Kierkegaard, the question "What am I?" is already an ethical question, a signification of concerned knowledge. The examined life is the best life that a man can live—a life of self-examination, a search for self-knowledge, a scrutiny of the self. The negation of every conceivable or imaginable theoretical possibility leaves only existential, spiritual possibilities, which only the individual can realize. Knowledge of the good is indeed a necessary and sufficient condition of right action (as Norman Gulley says in his *The Philosophy of Socrates*); but this knowledge is not primarily an objective knowledge of an a priori truth; rather, it is a subjective knowledge, a knowledge made possible by a critical analysis of the self. And it is this that Socrates sought to attain by means of *elenchus*, irony and indirection in his existential communication with others. Socratic skepticism (like Kierkegaard's skepticism) affects almost everything except the ethical resoluteness and self-existence of the individual. This, at any rate, lies at the core of Kierkegaard's understanding of Socratic irony (and its nihilistic implications) and is a conviction that plays a central role in his account of the essential form of ethical existence.

Whereas the nihilistic orientation is understood by Kierkegaard as a possible mode of being for any human being at any time (even though he, like Nietzsche, thought that the death of religious consciousness would carry in its wake the sense that life has become a "whirlpool, meaninglessness, and either a despairing arrogance or a despairing disconsolateness"), Heidegger conceives of nihilism as an anthropocentrism that proclaims that

there is only a multiplicity of beings (*Seiendes*) in a constant process of becoming and implies the "oblivion of Being." The Nietzschean will to power and the contemporary emphasis on 'technicity' are two sides of the same coin. Nietzsche's metaphysics is thought by Heidegger to be the culmination of a conceptual process that had been inherent in Plato's thought. The underlying meaning of this metaphysical tradition is, as he puts it in his Nietzsche, "anthropomorphy—the shaping and viewing of the world in accordance with man's image."⁴⁴ In such a standpoint man plays the role of the unconditioned measure of all things and of their value. What is surprising about such attacks on what he calls humanistic metaphysics is that they seem to apply to his hermeneutic, phenomenological analysis of the being of *Dasein* in *Sein und Zeit*. To be sure, Heidegger does explicitly say that this exhibition of the constitution of *Dasein's* mode of being is only one way to approach the question of Being: "Nevertheless, our way of exhibiting the constitution of *Dasein's* Being remains only *one way* which we may take. Our *aim* is to work out the question of Being in general."⁴⁵ But it is clear that *Dasein* is characterized, in general, as the center of meaning, purpose, and interpretation of phenomena. In some of his passionate remarks Heidegger comes quite close to the kind of humanism he identifies as nihilism. Thus he denies, at one point, that there are eternal truths *because Dasein* had not yet been shown to be eternal:

That there are 'eternal truths' will not be adequately proved until someone has succeeded in demonstrating that *Dasein* has been and will be for all eternity. As long as such a proof is still outstanding, this principle remains a fanciful contention.⁴⁶

Such a view may be compared with his later assertion, in *Gelassenheit*, that "man on his own has no power over truth and this [i.e., truth] remains independent of him."⁴⁷ While Kierkegaard's conception of ethical existence and his general emphasis on the primacy of subjectivity would presumably be branded as nihilistic (even though Kierkegaard himself regards ethical subjectivity as the overcoming of nihilism as he understands it), there is a sense in which there is a tension in Heidegger's thought con-

cerning the centrality of subjectivity. In his *Vom Wesen des Grundes* he does not hesitate to speak of the being that we are as *Subjekt* and to maintain (in almost the language of Kierkegaard) that to be a subject means, essentially, to be a being in and as transcending—transcendence is the basic structure of subjectivity (. . . *die Transzendenz bezeichnet das Wesen des Subjekts, ist Grundstruktur der Subjectivität*).⁴⁸ While Kierkegaard, too, may be said to have made the individual (in the religious sphere of existence) subservient to “the eternal,” he never truly abandons the centrality of subjectivity and, in fact, may be understood as presenting an inchoate philosophical anthropology that is based upon the personal, subjective perspective of human life. Heidegger, on the other hand, sometimes seems to characterize, by implication, his earlier *Sein und Zeit* as subjectivistic, humanistic, and hence, according to his definition, nihilistic.

Rosen argues in his study of nihilism that Heidegger's attempt to overcome European nihilism (as Nietzsche understood it) was a failure because *Sein und Zeit* is itself nihilistic insofar as “Heidegger radicalizes the absence of all gods into a denial of the presence of the eternal; as a result, the present has no enduring status in his thoroughly temporalized Being-process.” Furthermore, it is argued that Heidegger's “development of an ontology of historicity” represents a “resignation in the face of nihilism.”⁴⁹

The nihilism to which *Sein und Zeit* leads is, we are told, a position that is ostensibly “implicit in [the] ontological analysis of human existence.” This charge is primarily made because of Heidegger's insistence upon the dominance of temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*) in the human world. Presumably, Rosen would have to raise a similar criticism against Kierkegaard as well, since he, too, emphasizes that existence is only possible insofar as movement is possible and is, therefore, restricted to temporality (*Timelighed*). Though it is a mistake to assume that Heidegger's conception of authentic existence is an *ethical* requirement (despite the fact, as I shall suggest, that many of his descriptions of such an existence are closely related to Kierkegaard's existential ethics), his description of *Dasein*'s projective movement towards Being-one's-self—the selfhood of *Dasein*

being a way of existing—is a positive conception of what *Dasein* ought, in an ontological sense, to be. Though Heidegger's phenomenological analysis is, to be sure, primarily descriptive, it is also, in a sense, hortatory. Like Rilke, he implies that “it is necessary to change one's life.” His attack on the inauthenticity of the realm of *das Man* (which, of course, is reminiscent of Kierkegaard's attack upon “the crowd”) is a necessary corrective to the tendency in this century to deify society and collectivities. Certainly Heidegger's emphasis on individuating states of being is an echo of Kierkegaard's stress upon the accentuation of subjectivity in ethical self-existence.

I believe that Rosen is correct in discerning a nihilistic tendency underlying *Being and Time*, but I do not believe that it is related to Heidegger's conception of the temporality of the Being-process or to his emphasis upon the primacy of the temporal modality of the future. It is found rather in his notion (borrowed from Hegel) that there is nonbeing or nothingness in the being of *Dasein*. By averring that in uncanniness *Dasein* is confronted by its unvarnished negativity (“In uncanniness *Dasein* stands together with itself primordially. It brings this being face to face with its undisguised nullity . . .”),⁵⁰ that man, for the most part, is “lost in the they,” in irresoluteness (*Unentschlossenheit*), that “being-guilty” is an unsurpassable characteristic of *Dasein*, that there is a “lack of totality”—of the not-yet (*noch-Nicht*)—that “belongs” to *Dasein* so long as he is. Heidegger has presented a negativistic portrait of man that is practically anomalous in Western thought. At times, in his implicit portrayal of the abandonment and hopelessness of human being, he seems to echo, in philosophical language, the nihilism of Hölderlin's *Hyperion*—the sense that we are “in the grip of that Nothing which rules over us . . . thoroughly conscious that we are born for Nothing, that we love a Nothing, believe in a Nothing, work ourselves to the bone for Nothing, until we gradually dissolve into Nothing.”⁵¹ Against such a background one can see the positive and urgent significance of the *possibility* of the transformation of the self, of an asymptotic approximation to authentic self-being. That the universal determination of all thought and experience is, as Kant had implied in his *Kritik*, temporality

(*Zeitlichkeit*) does not mean that man cannot discover meaning in phenomena, cannot create a temporally conditioned and hence finite meaning for his existence, that he cannot endeavor to transcend the limitations of his natural being and strive to realize a spiritual existence that may justify his having been. If this temporally circumscribed process of individual becoming is, as Rilke said, "only for once" (*nur ein Mal*), then this "once," once having been authentic or "lived truth," can we not agree with Rilke that:

Just once,
everything, only for once. Once and no more. And we, too,
once. And never again. But this once,
having been once on earth—can it ever be cancelled?⁵²

For Kierkegaard, nihilism is not the ultimate culmination of a long, gradual metaphysical process that reaches its nadir in Nietzsche's *Will to Power* and is manifest in a technicity characterized by an endless attack upon the earth, a quantitative reduction of all phenomena (including man) to things for use, a dynamism that seems to be sweeping Western civilization to a counterfinality that mocks man's increasing power over nature. In the material objectification of the will to power the individual is caught up in a technocentric, mechanomorphic world in which his own personal existence is made senseless. Kierkegaard, of course, has little to say about such tendencies (unless one exaggerates his claim that scientism will end by corrupting man). Rather, nihilism is primarily a kind of theoretical dissolution that has its existential correlate in a subjective sense of emptiness and meaninglessness. The individual feels alone in a chaotic world, unable to seize upon a certainty or a purpose that would give meaning to his life. Heidegger's conception of nihilism as "subjectivism" or "subjectism" would surely apply not only to Kierkegaard's emphasis upon the centrality of the becoming of the individual but also to Socratic humanism (as Kierkegaard understood it) as well. Kierkegaard would certainly have agreed with Heidegger's claim (which undermines his condemnation of humanism) that "all representation of the whole of what is, all interpretation of the world, is, . . . inescapably humanization."⁵³

Nevertheless, nihilism meant, for Kierkegaard, a psychological-reflective condition, a mode of being, that can only be transcended through resoluteness by virtue of the attempt to realize one's own "oughtness-capability," one's potentiality-for (*kunnen*) ethical self-existence. As he puts it in his journals, one does not overcome a stultifying state of being by more knowledge or more thought; what is required is a transformation of the self—a "movement" of the self towards possibilities that one endeavors to realize in actuality. The circle of the nihilism of reflection can only be broken by "choosing oneself," by choosing the ethical possibility as one's own, by treating it as a form of "concernful knowledge" and not merely as one more hypothetical possibility. Before turning to an analysis of the relationship between possibility and existence, I would like to discuss another mode of nihilism that is tangential to my central concern here, i.e., to describe the nature of nihilism as Kierkegaard understood it.

Aestheticism and Nihilism

Though activist forms of nihilism are not directly relevant to my central concern and call for a separate treatment,⁵⁴ some are appropriate in this context. For, this form of nihilism is encompassed in Kierkegaard's Hegelian phenomenology of romantic irony and aestheticism in general.

The analysis of romantic irony in *The Concept of Irony* was a prolepsis of Kierkegaard's fuller analysis of the aesthetic sphere of being in *Either/Or*. Needless to say, romantic irony emerges in terms of the dominance of imagination (a fundamental source of idealities) over reason. This mode of irony comes into being in terms of the contrast between the actual and the ideal, the finite and the infinite, the imperfect and the perfect, the prosaic and the poetic, the limited and the unlimited. An underlying trait of the romantic ironist is a despairing disillusionment generated by the juxtaposition of an ideal possibility and prosaic actuality.

The refinement and cultivation of taste and an exquisite aesthetic sensibility (which is paradigmatically encouraged in Walter Pater's *Studies in the Renaissance*) has, of course, some

value. If it becomes obsessive and dominates a personality, however, it provides the psychological precondition for a pandemic disillusionment with all that is not beautiful or perfect—for the boredom that constitutes, as Kierkegaard puts it, the only continuity of a purely aesthetic existence. The painful evanescence of immediacy, no matter how pleasurable it may be, convinces the romantic ironist of the transitory nature of human existence, of the nihilating power of temporality. The project of the romantic ironist is radically paradoxical because he desires to eternalize finite immediacy. It is not surprising, then, that he has a proclivity for experiences of emptiness—of nothingness. In his journals Kierkegaard (and not the aesthete he portrays in *Either/Or*) gives vent to a typical romantic sentiment when he remarks that “there are . . . insects that die in the very moment of fertilization; so it is, after all, with all joy—life’s highest, most splendid moment of enjoyment is accompanied by death.”⁵⁵

Although the romantic ironist seeks to attain exalted states of being, a profound sense of ego-expansion, he is, in fact, engaged in a process of losing his self in the dissolution of a life of imagination dominated by moods; he is, that is, losing contact with concrete actuality. Like the dialectician of reflection, the romantic ironist is inclined to negate the meaningfulness of actuality. Although the ironic romanticism of the nineteenth century was, in some of its manifestations, distinctly religious in its form, it tended to become a kind of self-idolatry—a narcissistic self-preoccupation that retained, nevertheless, some of the categories of religious experience (e.g., the longing for the infinite or the eternal, the depreciation of finitude in relation to a quasi-religious realm of immutable perfection) without ethical restraint or humility. Quite often, as Kierkegaard understood so well, the romantic striving for endlessness (what the German romanticists called *Unendlichkeitstreben*) tended to lead to a longing for nothingness.

Disillusionment seems to underlie romantic irony since such irony involves a consciousness of the radical discrepancy between an elusive ideal and imperfect actuality. The romantic ironist denies himself a center or a central goal or project for his life. Romantic desire is indeterminate, diffuse, a nostalgia for what

always seems to elude one. The romantic ironist is subject to rapid shifts of mood (*Stimmungsbrechung*) and is restless and unstable.⁵⁶ Unable to commit himself to an absolute *telos*—insofar as the infinite for which the romantic longs is contentless and vague and hence is not an absolute *telos*—the romantic may turn his irony back upon himself.

In this regard, Kierkegaard was impressed with Solger’s understanding of irony, the realization that:

True irony derives from the point of view that so long as man lives in the present world, it is only in this world that he can fulfill his determination, and this in the highest sense of the word [vocation]. The striving for the infinite does not actually lead man beyond this life . . . but merely into indeterminateness and emptiness. It is inspired by . . . the feeling of earthly limitation to which we have been restricted once and for all.⁵⁷

There is an aspect of romantic irony, then, which can be used as an instrument to deflate the pretention and hubris of the romantic aesthete. There is the suggestion, as it were, that transcendence for a finite individual is towards the future, towards possibilities which can be actualized in time. Romantic irony can be construed as itself a signification of the decline of romanticism in its original form in the sense that it suggested that it is in actuality (not in imagination) that existence acquires validity, that “action . . . must have an apriority in itself so as not to become lost in vacuous infinity.”⁵⁸ If the romantic ironist could turn his corrosive irony upon himself, upon his own self-defeating mode of being, if he could expose the contrast between what he is in fact and what he imagines himself to be, then he might be able, in Hegel’s phrase, to negate the negation implicit in his life. What Kierkegaard calls “mastered irony” may be seen as the condition for the possibility of making significant choice, of choosing to become a self rather than a manifold of desires, drives, impulses, moods, cravings, and romantic longings. The nihilism that threatens the romantic ironist can be overcome if irony is turned against oneself insofar as one is continuously aware of the discrepancy between what one is and what one implicitly knows one ought to be. It is this sense of dialectical

opposition that intensifies subjective concern. One who has developed a capacity for mastered irony has already made a movement towards "the ethical."

The aestheticism that Kierkegaard understood so well is, of course, not a new phenomenon: its roots can be found in the literature of ancient Greece, in some decadent Roman literature, and in various periods of Western literature. However, aestheticism came to full bloom (notwithstanding the fact that it lingers on today in the cinema, in various "life styles," and in aesthetically conceived political stances) in the nineteenth century. Kierkegaard, as the phenomenologist of romanticism or romantic aestheticism, has, more than anyone else, managed to extract the "essence" of aestheticism in his discussions of romantic irony in the *Concept of Irony* and in his description of the aesthetic sphere of being in *Either/Or*. It is quite clear that aestheticism, as a way of life, is inclined towards a form of nihilism. For, in terms of the ineluctable devolution of the pursuit of pleasure in "immediacy," in the shipwreck of a purely hedonistic orientation in life, an aesthetic mode of being seems to entail an implicit denial of the meaningfulness of life as well as the suspension of moral judgment or the bracketing of moral distinctions.

Romantic irony has both a negative and positive aspect, the latter of which clearly plays a role, for Kierkegaard, in terms of his conception of man's oughtness-capability. The paradoxical process of relating an ideality to one's own actuality is not only a signification of existential subjectivity, but has a fundamental ironical aspect as well. The danger of aestheticism or romantic irony is its tendency to lead to passive despair, inactivity, irresolution, and a sense of hopelessness in the face of an imaginary ideality that one realizes cannot be attained in finite existence, and cannot even be approached in an approximation-process.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche expresses the central characteristic of one form of aesthetic nihilism when he avers that "only as an aesthetic spectacle is life and the world justified eternally." As in the case of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard conceived of the aesthetic mode of life as one in which the finite is eternalized, in which a paradoxical condition of a pleasurable eternal

present is sought. What the aesthetic sphere of life indicates, as Kierkegaard describes it, is its self-negating insufficiency.

All forms of aestheticism venerate the "form" of phenomena, the surface brilliance of phenomena (no matter how disastrous or destructive they may be). The aesthete wants "to burn with a hard, gem-like flame," as Walter Pater put it, setting uncomfortable moral questions aside. Aestheticism is nihilistic not so much because it posits a supramoral value (which, indeed, it does) but because it ignores or positively avoids moral questions. The cultivation of an exquisite, refined aesthetic taste is all; the creation or appreciation of beauty is all; the pleasure of the reflection or of the moment is all. As in the case of *soi-disant* political nihilism, aesthetic nihilism is, strictly speaking, a misnomer. For the aesthete does indeed value something; in point of fact, he absolutizes a temporal, fleeting actuality. On the other hand, by implication, all moral questions or moral values are shunted aside in a wholesale pursuit of pleasure or aestheticism. As in the case of the Italian lyric poet Leopardi, aestheticism has often been linked (as Kierkegaard points out in his *Either/Or*) with a nihilistic pessimism. Leopardi, the psychologist of his own aestheticism, explains one of the reasons for this. In his *Zibaldone* he notes that "the man most subject to falling into indifference and insensibility is the sensitive man, full of enthusiasm and mental activity. For such a man, just because of his unusual sensibility, exhausts life in a moment. And when he has done so, he remains profoundly disenchanted, for he has experienced everything deeply and intensely . . . has embraced everything and rejected it as unworthy and trivial. There is nothing more for him to see, to experience, or to hope."⁵⁰

In *Either/Or* Kierkegaard describes the spiritual exhaustion of the aesthete, the narcissistic self-enclosure that characterizes his life, the suicidal tendencies that are generated by a terrible "apathy." Although there seem to be many people who can go on living a purely aesthetic existence year after year, an existence that is usually a blend of erotic excitement and aesthetic appreciation, Kierkegaard sees in this mode of being (as an exclusive mode of being) an intrinsic, underlying despair that tends to negate the possibility of the very enjoyment the aesthete seeks.

A fascination with "glittering transitoriness" is not enough. The aesthetic perspective begins to narrow and the pleasure one seeks in immediacy seems more and more elusive. In his phenomenology of aestheticism—which could just as well be described as a phenomenology of romanticism—Kierkegaard, in the manner of Socrates, draws out all of the implications of such a form of life and sketches its psychologically self-negating *dénouement*. To be sure, the aesthetic orientation toward life ought not to be entirely eliminated; rather, it must be *aufgehoben* in the ethical and the religious spheres of existence.

Aestheticism, insofar as it is characterized (as it usually is) by moral indifference or indifference to moral distinctions, is itself a kind of moral nihilism. For the aesthete, too, everything is permitted, and he cannot legitimately condemn any action or behavior (provided that it can be transformed in the prism of the aesthetic point of view) from the standpoint of a violation of moral law. A purely aesthetic existence, dominated as it invariably is by imagination, tends towards the dual process of the dissolution of the self and a suspension of moral judgment. In a letter to Woodhouse, written in 1818, John Keats described the "poetic character" in the following way: "it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing—it has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated . . . What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the chameleon poet."⁶⁰

What Kierkegaard understood was the vulnerability of the aesthete to insensibility and moral corruption. To view all phenomena, even the sufferings of others, even the most despicable human actions, from a purely aesthetic perspective is itself a species of moral nihilism. What he tried to indicate in his impressionistic, imaginative, psychological portrait of the aesthete was that he is open to the same sense of emptiness, meaninglessness, and hopelessness as the reflective dialectician who cannot commit himself to no truth, who can find no mooring for his polemical analyses. While the nihilism of reflection and the exclusive aesthetic mode of life lead to the same psychological impasse, they reach this negativistic state of being by different paths. There are many roads to nihilism.

The Ethical Possibility

For Kierkegaard, the "nihilistic standpoint" can only be overcome by virtue of a resolute transformation of the self, a subjective inwardness that holds fast to a truth for which the individual can live. The end of the nihilism of reflection is a subjective commitment to an ethical goal or a resolve to make what Kierkegaard calls the "movement" of faith. If one waits passively for the resolution of the encounter with nihilism one must remind oneself that one has a potentiality to exist and that one is accountable (to oneself if to no one else) for what one is becoming. Whether we will it or not, the momentum of life carries us forward, carries us towards that ultimate possibility that is, so far as we know, the impossibility of possibility. The "movements" toward the realization of one's own unique possibilities, or those possibilities that enable one to become a self, require decisiveness and not merely a theoretical deliberation about alternative choices, decisions, or actions.

What I would call the nihilistic sphere of life (Kierkegaard does not describe the nihilistic standpoint in these terms in *The Concept of Irony*) is a permanent possibility for a man so long as he lives. While irony is indeed central to this mode of being, it can, as mastered irony, play a significant role in ethical existence. For a reflective irony suggests the possibility of an "ideality" that transcends the realm of actuality. If this ideality is understood in terms of what Max Scheler described as *Idealfaktoren* ("ideal factors"), in terms of a *telos* guiding the realization of spiritual possibilities, then irony can be understood as the process of constantly relating the ought to the is—the ideal self that one ought to be to the actual imperfect self that one is.

Neither the basis of this subjective certainty that provides a purpose for one's life nor *aretê* ("excellence") can be taught—directly. For *aretê* was thought of as something that proceeded from within, as a moral transformation that affected the entire, integral personality.⁶¹ To become a moral being, knowledge alone is insufficient; rather, reasoning, reflection, and deliberation must be paired with a passionate concern with becoming virtuous, with one's own existence. Without *pathos* or feeling,

Kierkegaard insists, there can be no ethical decisiveness. To be able to turn irony back upon ourselves is to realize the gap between what we ought to be and what we are. A mastered irony reveals the contradictions in our own existence—existence begins, as Kierkegaard puts it, in contradiction—and humbles us before our subjectively apprehended potentiality-for.

Ironic tension, when incorporated in moral self-consciousness, calls us back to a concern with our own existence, reminds us that we ought to seek to realize those 'spiritual' possibilities that are an expression of what is best in ourselves. What lies beyond the individual's acquaintance with his own potentiality-for becoming a self is subject to skeptical doubt. Although the ethical possibility for an individual arises in doubt, one cannot doubt that possibility for oneself. Kierkegaard understood the ethical commitment of Socrates not as a condemnation of actuality and life (as Nietzsche describes it in his *Wille zur Macht*) but as the one certainty to which Socrates clung. Perhaps, as Johannes Climacus will insist in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, the ethical self-existence of the individual is the only true certainty we have. Perhaps, as Socrates suggested before Nietzsche, a repetitious striving for self-mastery, for *Selbstüberwindung*, is the highest spiritual possibility that a man can endeavor to realize.

Socratic irony, when it is turned back upon the individual, is the generator of the tension of opposition, is a means by which one juxtaposes the finite and the infinite (whether it is a possible infinite being or infinite nothingness). To exist in a paradoxical relationship to a subjectively posited ideality, in objective uncertainty, in the face of one's own spiritual, existential possibilities, is to exist authentically. The individual who has become aware of the opposition between ideality (what could be or what ought to be) and actuality (immediate actuality) is one in whom I-consciousness has come to fruition, for it is precisely this juxtaposition of immediacy (which is nonlinguistic, nonconceptual) and ideality (conceptualized or linguistically expressed possibility) that entails the recognition of possibility. This confrontation of possibility in relation to the development of the self is an encounter with, as Kierkegaard puts it in *The Concept of Dread*, "the dreadful as well as the smiling,"⁶² for the attempt to

actualize one own's spiritual possibilities is a means by which to escape from the *cul de sac* of theoretical nihilism. But the sheer indeterminacy of possibility holds also the possibility of losing myself, of falling into the emptiness of immorality, or of endlessly seeking pleasures impossible to attain. Possibility is a double-edged sword because it not only "opens up" the hope of realizing my own unique spiritual potentialities but also generates an anxiety concerning what I *might* become. Socratic irony, as an instrument for critical analysis of the self, recalls us to what Heidegger calls "the silent power of the possible" (*die stille Kraft des Möglichen*). But, as Kierkegaard himself knew so well, the transition from conceptual-imaginative possibility to existential possibility is one of the most difficult "movements" to make, for the resolute choice to attempt to realize one's own spiritual, existential possibilities entails the assumption of full responsibility for what one is becoming. No longer does one evaporate responsibility by converting it into a theoretical question for which there are a multiplicity of alternative answers or by placing the question of responsibility at a "psychic distance," diffusing it in the colorful light of the aesthetic perspective. An ethical existence or a moral self-consciousness is precisely a condition in which one has become fully aware of a potentiality-for becoming a self by virtue of choice, decision, and action. The virtue that Socrates spoke about, Kierkegaard believed, could not be taught because it is not a doctrine, a teaching, a subject-matter; rather it is "a being-able, an exercising, an existing, an existential transformation."⁶³

Kierkegaard's phenomenology of Socratic existence served as a means of interpreting the meaning of irony, of representing the nihilistic sphere of existence, of analyzing the significance of Socratic subjectivity—what Hegel described as a mere "negative moment" in the development of consciousness. Kierkegaard attempted to penetrate the underlying meaning of this *soi-disant* negative moment, this nihilism, in order to indicate the role it played in the generation of I-consciousness, inwardness, and the search for meaning through a pursuit of "concernful knowledge." He understood that theoretical nihilism was fused with a subjective sense of meaninglessness that, in turn, stimulated an

unending process of reflection that returned again and again to the zero point of doubt. A journal entry dating from three years *before* he completed his master's thesis indicates his understanding of his situation:

What I have often suffered from was that all the doubt, trouble, and anguish which my real self wanted to forget in order to achieve a view of life, my reflective self sought to impress and preserve, partly as a necessary, partly as an interesting stage, out of fear that I should have falsely ascribed a result to myself.⁶⁴

What Kierkegaard lived through is, to some extent, partially described by Hegel in his account of "skeptical self-consciousness." While Hegel denigrates such a "confused consciousness" as one caught in a "giddy whirl of a perpetually self-creating disorder," he admits that skeptical self-consciousness discovers its own freedom and knows itself as a consciousness that contains contradictions within itself.⁶⁵ For Kierkegaard, it is precisely at this point of the recognition of the duality of consciousness that concerned consciousness (i.e., reflection having relevance for one's personal existence) emerges. To be sure, the whirlwind of the nihilism of reflection can be overcome, but not by extending human reason beyond its limits—not by constructing a universal rationalistic system that pretends to explain everything. The duality of consciousness does not have only the negative meaning that Hegel attributes to it; rather, it is condition of finite consciousness that can never be surpassed. The contradictions in the thought and existence of a finite individual can never be mediated or synthesized. Human existence is paradoxical—is characterized by dialectical tension.

Corresponding to the unending dialectical reflection of skeptical self-consciousness is a subjective "absolute spiritual incapacity" characteristic of a nihilistic stage of life. The only "movement" that Kierkegaard (or the reflective nihilist) is capable of is the ostensible movement of thought. Hence he sees Socrates as the archetypal dialectician who "conceives everything in terms of reflection." The phenomenology of the existence of Socrates is an indirect communication of Kierkegaard's own nihilism, a por-

trayal of the nihilistic stage of life that, it is suggested, is perhaps a necessary stage in the personal and intellectual development of the individual. As Kierkegaard conceives of it, nihilism is, in one sense, liberating: it frees the individual from the accumulated categories of the past, and from the conventional beliefs of his own time and place and thus opens the way for a renewed reflection upon life, experience, the world, and the self from the perspective of a critical self-consciousness. In another sense, of course, nihilism is dangerous—an abyss from which the individual may never escape. Unfortunately, one of the most common ways in which human beings attempt to find a cure for their encounter with nihilism is through irrational action. A persistent, honest, and consistent "living in" a nihilistic mode of being is something that few individuals (even individuals with the spiritual strength of a Nietzsche or a Kierkegaard) can long endure. What Kierkegaard says about irony could just as well be said about a "lived" nihilism: "Irony is an abnormal growth . . . it ends by killing the individual."⁶⁶

The ironic or nihilistic sphere of existence is a *via negativa*. It is a form of being that is a contingent possibility for any individual in any historical period in which reflective human beings live. It can have the positive function of stimulating a passionate search for meaning, purpose, and significance in regard to what is an 'object' of profound concern: one's own existence and the direction of one's own life. Nihilism dramatizes the question of the meaning of one's own life and generates a search for a firm foundation of one's existence.⁶⁷